

cut opening scene?
heart attack trying to
do something

cut dolphins

Stark hummed by
hitmen after
he breaks out
heart attack?

THE
IRONMAN

Buried under cars
Superman II

Final 20 pages

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、 "All of space and time was mine. It was extraordinary. I've never felt such power. My entire body was engaged in this hyper-real, virtual reality."

Tony Stark

"Virtual reality is worth zillions!"

Jeremy Bland

"Time to eat crow, metal head."

The IronMan

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - 2 AM - CLOSE ON A SCREEN

Staccato promotional music introduces the CORPORATE LOGO, *SI*, in a metal-burnished circle, shining with graphic brilliance. And the well-rehearsed, charismatic voice of a NARRATOR launches in with--

NARRATOR V.O.

Ladies and gentlemen, behold the fast-forward world of tomorrow... today!

Archived footage of soldiers and military vehicles march in formation. A YOUNG MAN, handsome, focused, stands in a military review, saluting from a podium.

NARRATOR V.O.

And meet the visionary captain of 21st Century technology, Stark International's founding board member, Tony Stark, a man whose genius truly has no bounds.

Montage: PRESIDENT JOHN KENNEDY shakes hands with a youthful Tony Stark. Stark smashes the BOW OF A SHIP with a champagne bottle and the boat launches. Stark is toasted at a BLACK TIE RECEPTION. Stark signs an agreement with ARAB OIL MINISTERS.

NARRATOR V.O.

Stark International burst onto the business scene some thirty years ago with a sizable military research contract from the United States government. From there it was only up as the young Stark guided his company through the development of numerous weapons, transport, communications and research systems.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - 2 AM - TWO PEOPLE

surrounded by empty seats, are defined in silhouette by flickering light which is emitted from a booth behind them.

NARRATOR V.O.

The escalation of the Cold War, dominated by U.S. dollars, made for rapid economic growth when Stark International developed such technologies as the Proton RailGun and the Remote Satellite Killer...

ON THE SCREEN the stubby muzzle and guiding metal shaft of a RAILGUN is held by a U.S. Army SOLDIER. He crouches and shoots. The gun emits a glob of glowing anti-matter which flies through the air and demolishes a state-of-the-art M1-2A tank with a direct hit.

NARRATOR V.O.

...but when the bottom fell out of the Strategic Defense Initiative, Tony Stark met the challenge of the changing world order with his utopian vision, diversifying the company's interests by developing the Hydrogen Proton Propulsion System (HPP) for the AeroSpace Plane (ASP).

Stock footage reveals a PROPULSION ENGINE strapped to a harness which is fired in a test. A Concord-like SUPERSONIC JET is propelled by the same engine as it slices through clouds.

NARRATOR V.O.

During the chip wars, Stark achieved success with the development of the revolutionary bio-chip, capturing world market shares. And from those early beginnings, Stark International has been a leader in Artificial Intelligence technology.

A POV races down rows of Cray supercomputers, banks of compact mega-thinkers hooked in tandem. Stark is surrounded by YOUNG ENGINEERS in white lab coats, pointing, directing, in control.

NARRATOR V.O.

Now Stark International is prepared to take the high ground...

(pauses for impact)

...ushering in an age of robotics are several forward-thinking designs including the Warfare Robot Project.

An ANTHROPOMORPHIC SHAPE begins to form, first with wire-like infrastructure, then electronic overlay of component networks, finally a skin, all of which begin to look like front and side views of an immense Robot.

NARRATOR V.O.

Stark International. Visions of tomorrow... for today.

An OLDER TONY STARK, still charismatic and vibrant, stands on a tarmac as a formation of futuristic-looking advanced SI-2YA FIGHTER JETS scream by overhead.

FADE OUT.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - 2 AM - CEILING LIGHTS FADE UP

revealing MIKE ELLIOT, fifty, bald, all business and MARLENE FORTUNE, thirtysomething, attractive, poised even at this late hour.

MARLENE

What a dynamo.

ELLIOT

Yes, he certainly WAS...

MARLENE

What do you mean?

ELLIOT

(points at screen)

The promotional film was made eighteen months ago.

MARLENE

When Stark International was taken over?

ELLIOT

Technically, we merged. We needed capital, and unfortunately we let the fox into the hen house.

MARLENE

You're referring to Jeremy Bland?

Elliot nods, made instantly weary from the subject matter.

MARLENE

But what about Stark? I thought he owned a majority of the stock?

ELLIOT

He does. But for how long? After his second heart attack, he went into seclusion. For a while he was in Tibet. There were rumors of a new project. Equipment orders faxed from far flung locations. Lots of secrecy...

(then)

...you came on-board at a challenging time, Ms. Fortune.

MARLENE

As long as Tony Stark isn't in the habit of killing the messengers of bad news, I'll be all right.

INT. LIMBO SPACE - 3 A.M. - A CIRCLE

lies like a futuristic wrestling mat in the middle of a room. A MAN, face in shadows, dressed in a black jumpsuit, walks across the circle, stepping close to--

THE WARFARE ROBOT PROJECT (WRP) a grey, sleek, hi-tech samurai, which stands head and shoulders above the Man, with military markings: *FUEL ROD INSERTION, NO STEP.*

CLOSE ON A METAL CYLINDER which the Man lifts off a shelf and carries to--

Below WRP's left arm. A label above a hinged DOOR reads *BIO-CORE ASSEMBLY*. The Man opens the door and slides the metal cylinder into the slot in the trunk of the big machine. Whining start-up noises sound.

MAN

Hello and describe your function, please?

The WRP's sound system hisses to life with a voice which is dry, unaffected, evenly modulated.

WRP

I am warfare robot model ONE-Y ELEVEN FOURTEEN. My experimental, classified bio-core hard drives have been designed to operate with a will of their own, free of any human programmer.

CLOSE ON A METAL CASE which sits on a table. The Man's hands spin combi-locks, unsnapping the clasps, lifting open the lid.

The Man looks down on the contents of the case.

MAN

(to the robot)
Step into the center of the circle.

INTO THE BULLSEYE, with the hiss and clank of heavy machinery, the huge Robot obeys.

Another sound, the WHIRL of un-telescoping metal, fills the room and--

OUT OF SHADOW, the Man, totally transformed, wears a red and gold METALLIC SKIN which conforms to the contours of his body. Boots, gloves, small propulsion jets at the wrists and ankles, and a helmet out of which HUMAN EYES look, calm, cool, collected. The Man picks up--

A PLATINUM TRIANGLE which he snaps into a recessed port on the suit's chest. Turbines whir, mechanisms start and this IronMan steps out onto the mat, facing the Warfare Robot with--

IRONMAN

Position 2...

Instantly the Warfare Robot leaps, sending BAM! BAM! BAM! a series of punches to--

THE MID-SECTION of the IronMan who reels backward but remains on his feet. Rapid as pistons--

Metal fists make contact KLANG! KLANG! KLANG! with a FEATURELESS FACE. The Warfare Robot is impervious to the blows. A standoff. The two gladiators are perfectly still.

IRONMAN

This will be our last meeting.

WRP

LAST? Explain please?

IRONMAN

You are a dangerous invention,
ONE-Y. I have decided to
terminate you...

(pause)

...position 14.

PORTS OPEN revealing DUAL SPEAKERS on either side of the Robot's head which emit SONIC BLASTS--

KERHONK! blowing the IronMan backwards with devastating force, out of the circle and crashing into a wall, cracking cement with a RUMBLE! which resonates throughout the building.

INT. FACTORY GUARD HOUSE - 3 A.M. - THE SECURITY GUARD

talks on the phone as his coffee mug jitters across the desk.

GUARD

(telephone squawk)

Yes, Mr. Elliot. About half an
hour ago he locked himself in the
"skunkworks".

The Guard grabs the mug before it tips off the desk's edge.

INT. LIMBO SPACE - 3 A.M. - THE IRONMAN

stands slowly, shakes off the sonic blow and steps back into the bullseye, facing the Warfare Robot.

WRP
Your decision is... unreasonable.

STARK
But necessary. Position 7.

CLOSE ON THE ROBOT'S EYES which begin to glow with menace, as LASER BEAMS leap from their depths, searing--

METAL on the IronMan's chest plate. It begins to bubble away, hotter and hotter, revealing HUMAN SKIN which burns.

PROPULSION JETS SPARK at the Suit's ankles and wrists, propelling the IronMan away from the deadly light beams.

POV - HEADSUP DISPLAY - Inside the suit, gauges, readouts, system lights and a grid overlay the aerial view of the room. The Warfare Robot wheels around, finding its opponent. As the POV flies right at its adversary.

KANG! metal feet smash into the Warfare Robot's face, knocking it off balance, tumbling it outside the circle. Silence.

IN THE BULLSEYE the Warfare Robot GROWLS as it steps back into the arena, facing the IronMan.

IRONMAN
What is wrong?

WRP
I WANT TO LIVE!!!

Instantly the Warfare Robot leaps at the IronMan and--

KER-KLONG! they collide in the center of the bullseye, locked in each other's grip, equally matched, METAL AGAINST METAL.

The fists of the IronMan jackhammer a succession of blows GONG! GONG! GONG! at the Robot's mid-section. Something in the Robot's eyes smolder and suddenly--

The Warfare Robot lashes out, embracing the IronMan in a death-grip. It squeezes tight, pinning the IronMan's arms at his side as metal strains from the pressure.

POV - HEADSUP DISPLAY - Red lights and warning tones react to the impossible force being exerted. Now a head-butt from the Warfare Robot KANG! shakes everything and obliterates the view.

INT. LIMBO SPACE - 3 A.M. - THE IRONMAN

with tremendous exertion, frees up one arm and brings down his fist CLANG! CLANG! CLANG! CLANG! hammering away at--

THE ROBOT'S HEAD which slowly distorts from the repeated hits, but the Warfare Robot keeps on squeezing.

POV - HEADSUP DISPLAY - The grid overloads with conflicting warnings, alarms and updates.

INSIDE THE SUIT Stark's face is a mixture of resolve and panic as a haze of smoke begins to cloud the cramped space.

IRONMAN
Terminate the position!

INT. LIMBO SPACE - 3 A.M. - THE WARFARE ROBOT

doesn't respond. In fact the death-grip becomes tighter and tighter as--

CLANG! CLANG! CLANG! CLANG! the IronMan's free fist beats again on the Robot's head, the shape of the metal bending and melting like the grill work of a car after a head-on collision. But the Warfare Robot continues to squeeze.

CLOSE ON HUMAN EYES, seen through the protective eyeports inside the suit, as they blink and wince, trying to stave off the pain that precedes unconsciousness.

IRONMAN
I repeat. TERMINATE THE POSITION!

The Ironman gropes desperately with his trapped hand at--

THE HINGED DOOR which is marked *BIO-CORE ASSEMBLY*. The red-gloved hand scratches, denting its surface.

The Warfare Robot's powerful HAND grabs the IronMan's face and squeezes tight.

POV - HEADSUP DISPLAY - The massive hand obscures everything. As pressure CRACKS the protective eyeports, hi-impact glass shatters.

INT. LIMBO SPACE - 3 A.M. - THE IRONMAN

lashes out with a final effort and--

KERCLANG!!! a powerful blow punches through the Bio-Core assembly door. The gloved hand reaches in and, with a powerful swipe, rips out wads of wire, circuitry and the metal cylinder.

IN THE BULLSEYE the Warfare Robot SHRIEKS and WHINES, freezing instantly, like a toy whose batteries have been yanked out. Silence. The IronMan unsteadily pries himself out of the Robot's grip. He falls to the ground and crawls away.

CLOSE ON IRONMAN'S GLOVED HAND which opens, letting go of the cylindrical metal Bio-Core assembly which rolls across the floor and comes to a stop CLINK! next to--

THE WARFARE ROBOT, a smoldering, lifeless hulk.

INT. "SKUNKWORKS" - LATER - THE MAN

back in the jumpsuit, visibly shaken, steps--

INTO LIGHT and for the first time his face is revealed. It is TONY STARK. His lip is cut and there's a bruise over his eye. He holds up a small, black sphere, a VIDNOTEPAD, which is supported by a table-top tripod. Stark switches it on, a red recording light blinks, and he faces the recorder with--

STARK

My decision to terminate WRP ends a long, dark chapter in my life. It is frightening to consider how successful this invention actually is...

(pause, thoughtful)

...the bio-chips create a near-human personality which is capable of waging war on its own terms. Unleashed to fulfill its destiny, more powerful than any nuclear device, WRP is quite capable of dismantling society as we know it.

EXT. MASSIVE FACTORY - 4 A.M. - THE LOGO SI

in red and gold, sits atop a massive warehouse. An ND SEDAN pulls to a stop near a futuristic SPORTS CAR.

INT. FACTORY GUARD HOUSE - 4 A.M. - THE SECURITY GUARD

feet up on the desk, rouses from a nap as the sound of footsteps echo through the large space. Mike Elliot and Marlene Fortune stop in front of the Guard.

GUARD

Mr. Elliot...? Good evening.

ELLIOT

Good MORNING, Jimmy. This is Marlene Fortune.

GUARD

How do you do, mamm--

A tone sounds, causing the three to turn and--

CLUNK! KLANG! WHIR! a massive DOOR swings open, revealing Tony Stark. Relaxed, walking with well-springs of strength, he approaches, hand extended, a warm smile on his face.

STARK

Mike, it's good to see you.

ELLIOT

Tony, it's great to see YOU.

Elliot's expression clouds when he notices the cuts and bruises. Stark recovers with--

STARK

It's nothing. My karate instructor was a little rough on me.

(turning)

And you must be Marlene Fortune?

ELLIOT

Magna Cum Laude, Harvard Law. Six years at Kidder, Peabody. She went nose to nose on a daily basis with those old buzzards.

Tony Stark sizes up the new employee with a steady gaze.

MARLENE

Mister Elliot likes my resume.

(offers her hand)

But what I'm really proud of is my second degree black belt from the Shotokan school. You studied at...?

STARK

I was taught the Goju-Ryu system on the island of Okinawa.

INT. WAREHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER - STARK

is troubled by what he has heard so far. Marlene is impressed by Stark's intensity as Elliot plows ahead with--

ELLIOT

...we survived the proxy fight,
but the cancellation of Pentagon
contracts only puts more pressure
on you, Tony. It's clear that
Bland wants to cannibalize
everything you ever invented.

STARK

Mike, I was not put on this earth
to babysit millionaire investors.

MARLENE

Unfortunately those millionaire
investors don't see the future the
way you do, Mr. Stark--

STARK

--very few people on this planet
realize that the FUTURE is
constantly at stake, Ms. Fortune.

Marlene shoots a glance at Elliot who plows ahead with--

ELLIOT

Tony, face facts. You're no
longer the lone inventor. Whether
you like it or not, your company
is being run with other people's
money.

STARK

(not listening)

My new project will require more
time... along with OTHER PEOPLE'S
MONEY.

MARLENE

Can you tell us about this new
project?

STARK

It's a body suit which extends the
capabilities of the human anatomy
far beyond anyone's wildest
imagination.

Marlene and Elliot are intrigued. They want to hear more.

STARK

That's all I can say right now.

Stark's eyes narrow with a severe intensity.

STARK

Mike I've made billions inventing weapons of war, Mike. I'm at a point in my life where I want to contribute something which celebrates creation instead of destruction.

(then)

So, what's the bottom line?

ELLIOT

It wouldn't hurt to meet with the Board, try to win a few friends.

EXT. STARK'S MASSIVE FACTORY - DAWN - THE SPORTS CAR

silently leaps into motion, driving away from the building. A moment later HEADLIGHTS blink on, and the ND SEDAN roars to life, following the sports car out of the parking lot.

INT. LINCOLN TUNNEL - DAWN - TONY STARK

drives very fast, passing cars that seem to stand still. Fluorescent lights ripple across the windshield as--

IN STARK'S POV the Manhattan skyline comes into view when the sports car emerges from the tunnel.

INT. PENTHOUSE - DAY - A CAVERNOUS INTERIOR

composed of futurist Italian furniture, Goya paintings and curved, eccentric lines. On the slab cement table sits the metal briefcase.

A breakfast of half a grapefruit, three blueberries, a bottle of GEYSER PEAK spring water, the New York Times and piles of paperwork await--

Stark, wearing a bathrobe, hair wet, who sits, uncaps a bottle of PRESCRIPTION MEDICINE and swallows a PILL.

INT. AUSTERE OFFICE - DAY - HAL LLOYD

A weak-chinned, snivelling executive in a rumpled suit, stands before a MAN who sits with his back to us at a massive desk.

LLOYD

My wife left last night. She took my children with her. And now you're telling me I'm fired? My life's ruined. You can't do this to me.

(silence)

I did everything you told me to do. I'm not guilty of any crime.

The Man at the desk doesn't respond to Lloyd's suffering.

LLOYD

Say something, Mr. Bland! What else do you want from me?

The Man at the desk stands. This is JEREMY BLAND. Fifty, virile, with a killer instinct and hawk-like features to match.

BLAND

I want your admission of guilt. The SEC will be curious to know who leaked all that confidential information about Stark International. Although I may have suggested the maneuver, you never heard it from me.

(philosophical)

The way I see it, even though you aren't guilty, you get five to ten, minimum, you're raped in prison, die of some horrible disease... I'm sorry, Hal. It must be very disappointing to you.

CLOSE ON A BUTTON under the lip of the desk which Bland pushes.

KNOCK! KNOCK! Bland shakes his head with--

BLAND

That must be the SEC.

(then)

Should I let them in?

Hal Lloyd jumps out of his skin, running in circles around the room.

KNOCK! KNOCK! Lloyd stops, out of breath, whimpering. Something catches his attention.

FLOOR-TO-CEILING WINDOWS reveal a breath-taking plunge of fifty stories to the Manhattan streets below. Lloyd hurls himself at the tinted glass, bounces off, and stands, legs rubbery, trembling, a storm of confusion on his face.

BLAND

(under his breath)

If at first you don't succeed...?

The resolve on Lloyd's face strengthens. Taking several steps back, he runs at the windows and KERASH! a shower of shards and a jagged hole is all that remains.

BLAND
...pathetic.

Bland presses the button again and--

THE DOORS open revealing Bland's buxom secretary, CAMILLE, who steps into the room.

BLAND
Camille, there's been a horrible accident. Will you please call maintenance?

INT. BOARDROOM - DAY - THE SI LOGO

shines with burnished-metal elegance from a wall at the end of a massive, black table where TWELVE BOARD MEMBERS, including Tony Stark, Jeremy Bland, Mike Elliot and his assistant Marlene Fortune are caught up in the middle of an impassioned debate.

BLAND
I've got a list here of over one hundred technologies which company money was spent to develop. And I demand we take them into the market place! Now!

CHAMBERS
I have to agree, Tony. You hand out your inventions to us as if we were kids on Christmas morning.

Remaining calm, Stark glances around the room with--

STARK
What you propose is impossible. I will not sell technology I have no confidence in.

CHAMBERS
Why not let us be the judge of that?

BLAND
Frankly, I have yet to meet any inventor who was ever worth his weight as a businessman.

Marlene watches the playing field carefully.

ELLIOT

Mr. Stark has assured me that he is on the verge of an incredible breakthrough which will create huge profits for the company and contribute to healing the environment.

Bland turns and nods imperceptibly to McLuhan who apparently has a rehearsed set of lines.

MCLUHAN

I support Tony's agenda here. I'm willing to give him more time and money.

CHAMBERS

(in on the act)
And what happens if his latest invention isn't up to Stark's secret specifications?

BLAND

That's right! Another invention for the junkpile, and we're left with nothing to sell.

ELLIOT

I find this behavior inexcusable. Tony Stark has made everyone in this room a lot of money--

BLAND

--save the praise for somebody's epitaph.

Stark stands and steps close to Jeremy Bland. He wants to punch the over-confident Board Member in the face. But instead, Stark shoots an angry glance at Mike Elliot and crosses to massive, oak double doors, pausing with--

STARK

It was suggested that I meet with the Board in an attempt to calm the doubts. But I can see I have been judged before the trial begins.

(scans the room)

I own 51% of this company, and you'll have to live with that.

Stark leaves.

BLAND

He lords HIS one percent majority over us like a dictator.

CHAMBERS

I agree, Jeremy. The guy's on a power trip.

PYNCHON

I think Tony deserves our respect as an exemplary scientist and businessman.

BLAND

Bullshit! I get into business with someone who I think is an aggressive businessman, and a year later he's talking about saving the planet!

PYNCHON

C'mon, Jeremy, you own race horses, buildings in L.A. and Chicago, vacation homes all over the world. Why, you have enough money to survive three recessions. I say we give Stark more time.

BLAND

Fuck the planet! I'm losing money!

Mike Elliot rises, commanding everyone's attention with--

ELLIOT

As Tony Stark's attorney I assure you, he's perfectly within his rights. Even if he was rendered incompetent, incapacitated or deceased, he would still control the policy of this company.

Bland reacts with a sinister scowl.

EXT. STARK INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS - DAY - TONY STARK

carrying the metal case, nods to a DOORMAN and gets into the back seat of a stretch Mercedes limousine which bleeds into Manhattan traffic moving uptown.

INT. LIMOUSINE - DAY - STARK

rubs his chest, uncaps a prescription bottle, dumps out several PILLS and swallows them dry. He pulls out his VidNotePad as Mid-town rolls by outside.

STARK

Note. Call Hokaido regarding
alternate production capabilities
off-shore...

The CELLULAR PHONE rings and Stark picks it up with--

STARK

Hello?

(phone squawk)

Mike! That meeting was a joke.
Bland wants to rape the company
and dump the dead carcass. Our
third quarter alone looked better
than most companies' entire years.

Stark rubs his chest, tenses, feeling the stress.

STARK

(phone squawk)

--I understand the risks, Mike.
Let's try to raise more capital!
There's going to be a fight for
control here... AGRKKK!!!

Stark kicks out, writhing in total, crippling pain which comes
in waves through his shoulders and arms.

EXT. NEW YORK STREETS - DAY - PARAMEDICS

lift the barely conscious form of Tony Stark out of the back
seat of the limousine. He may be in pain, but Stark won't let
go of the metal case which the Paramedics tug at.

PARAMEDIC #1

He's got an iron grip on that
thing.

PARAMEDIC #2

Let him keep it. We've got to
roll or we'll lose him.

The paramedics place Stark in a stretcher, lifting it through--

THE DOORS OF AN AMBULANCE which close as sirens howl and the
emergency vehicle drives onto a curb, around stalled traffic.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY - A DOCTOR

pushes aside the plastic canopy of an Intensive Care Bed and
smiles with a warm, bedside manner down at--

TONY STARK who is barely conscious, with tubes running out of
his nose and mouth. Meters monitor his metabolism.

DOCTOR

Tony, the last time I saw you,
didn't we agree you were through
having heart attacks?

Stark manages a weak smile.

DOCTOR

(serious now)

What you've had is a HEART ATTACK
STORM. And I'm going to have to
put a pacemaker into your chest.

Stark tries to react, forming words with his mouth, when--

DOCTOR

Ah, ah, ah. Don't try to talk me
out of it AGAIN. You know the
prescription. After the
operation, R-E-S-T. Plenty of it.
No business, no travel, nothing
that will cause my patient any
undue stress.

STARK

(weakly)

...my briefcase?

DOCTOR

You haven't heard a word I've
said, have you?

(points)

It's in the corner, but I'm going
to have the nurse put it in
storage.

STARK

NO!

The unexpected force behind Stark's voice frightens the doctor.

DOCTOR

I'm not kidding about the rest.
A pre-op team will be up here
within the hour.

When the Doctor leaves--

Stark hoists himself up onto an elbow. The effort is almost
too much. But now he sees it--

ON A CHAIR in the corner sits the metal case. Dressed in
hospital white, trailing tubes and wires--

Stark shuffles across the room and with great effort lifts the metal case onto the bed. CLICK! CLICK! The lid comes open and Stark stares down at--

TWO BLACK DISCS with divots in the shape of hand and foot impressions.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - DAY - MIKE ELLIOT AND MARLENE FORTUNE

anxiously wait at a desk marked *HEART CARE UNIT* as a Nurse checks records on a chart.

NURSE

And you are Mrs. Stark?

MARLENE

No... I'm a business associate.

NURSE

I'm sorry. Only immediate family is allowed to visit the patient at this time.

ELLIOT

But he has no immediate family to speak of! This is ridiculous! I want to speak to a supervisor!

NURSE

(icy)

One moment, please...

Marlene sneaks a glance at--

THE NUMBERS 1537 which are written next to Tony Stark's name. While the Nurse is in a staring contest with Elliot, Marlene steps down the hallway to--

INT. HALLWAY - DAY - ROOM 1537

Marlene glances over her shoulder, opens the door and anxiously peers inside with--

MARLENE

Mr. Stark?

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY - MARLENE

walking softly, steps close to the plastic canopy. The monitors and pumps all sound normal.

MARLENE

Mr. Stark?

Silence. Marlene pulls aside the plastic and sees--

AN EMPTY BED with no Tony Stark.

EXT. HOSPITAL ROOF - DAY - A MAINTENANCE WORKER

wearing a protective mask spot-welds a broken air conditioning strut. He hears a HISSING sound, shuts off his torch, raises the mask and glances up with--

MAINTENANCE WORKER

What the...?

A WHITE HOSPITAL GOWN flutters down, landing on his face.

EXT. SKY - DAY - THE LOWER TORSO

of the metal-sheathed, red and gold human shape, emitting a turbine HISS, disappears into a bank of white clouds.

POV - HEADSUP DISPLAY - The view banks and turns, flying through clouds. It's exhilarating, like sex, and John Williams conducts. The screen updates all systems, including surface temperature and operator metabolism. One meter reveals that Stark's heart beat is irregular.

EXT. SKY - DAY - THE IRONMAN

banks left, then right, then up, accelerating into white chambers of water and atmosphere. Emerging from the misty stillness--

The IronMan loops and twirls and halts, hovering in space. He raises his arms toward the disc of the SUN, as if touching the face of God.

STARK V.O.

Suffered third myocardial infarction in eighteen months. Beat death again. But I don't know who to thank. Without the suit, I wouldn't be alive today. Must keep going. The stakes are too high...

INT. DELMONICO'S PRIVATE DINING ROOM - DAY - JEREMY BLAND

sits across from BOB WESTLAKE and BOB STUBIN, two Vice Presidents with type-A personalities, wearing grey suits, blue ties and identical haircuts. The meal is opulent, but Stubin drinks only milk while Westlake nibbles a cracker.

BLAND

Gentlemen, I'm very happy today. The timing of Tony Stark's heart attack couldn't have been better if I planned it myself. Tell me more about this, what do you call it? The Howard Hughes scenario?

Stubin winks at Westlake with--

STUBIN

It's straight out of a CIA EYES ONLY file.

WESTLAKE

Back in '56 everyone at Langley saw VietNam coming hot and heavy.

STUBIN

So they ran a check on any military contractors who might be a problem.

WESTLAKE

Howard Hughes topped the list.

STUBIN

Hollywood lifestyle, eccentric habits, a big supplier for the Pentagon.

WESTLAKE

And like Stark, an inventor who everybody would miss, if you didn't play the scenario right.

STUBIN

So a subcontractor for the government kidnapped Mr. Hughes, hooked him on heroin, replaced him with an actor...

Bland becomes more and more delighted as this idea unfolds.

WESTLAKE

...and ran his company the way he would have, if only he had managed to stay off those NASTY drugs.

STUBIN

So! The Pentagon had an uncompromised source of helicopters and an American success story was born.

STUBIN (CONT.)
(to the Waiter)
Can we get some more crackers?

In the silence that follows, Bland processes the implications of Westlake and Stubin's pitch.

BLAND
What about Stark's friends on the Board? I need a clear majority.

WESTLAKE AND STUBIN
(together)
It's a simple matter of spending money in the right places.

BLAND
An excellent strategy. I like it.
(to the waiter)
The chocolate mousse, please.
(to himself)
I'll turn Tony Stark into my own private think tank.
(to Westlake/Stubin)
And, guys? Don't disappoint me.

Westlake and Stubin hear the edge in Bland's voice.

INT. TOKYO AIRPORT - DAY - MARLENE FORTUNE

threads her way through the crowded interior. Carrying only a briefcase, she exits the building.

EXT. JAPANESE ESTATE - DAY - A TAXI CAB

stops and Marlene steps out, surveying a--

EXT. BONSAI GARDEN - DAY - ON THE EDGE OF THE PACIFIC OCEAN

Unsure of herself, Marlene wanders through the garden. She hears SQUEAKING SOUNDS as she steps around a corner and sees--

EXT. PETTING POOL - DAY - THREE DOLPHINS

glide through the water, nodding at a MAN who swims in their midst. Nearby stands a NURSE who measures the Man's progress against the second hand on her watch.

Marlene steps closer and smiles, seeing someone she recognizes.

NURSE
(phonetic Japanese)
That's one mile, Tony.
Congratulations. How do you feel?

Climbing out of the pool, Stark grabs a towel and rubs his muscular chest with--

STARK
Stronger. But there's still pain.

MARLENE O.S.
Mr. Stark?

STARK
Marlene Fortune. Welcome to Japan.
(offers his hand)
You've been travelling for at least 36 hours, but you look like you just stepped out of a fashion magazine. How do you do it?

Marlene blushes and swallows her response.

STARK
It's a compliment, Marlene, not a proposition.

MARLENE
You gave Mike and I quite a scare, disappearing from the hospital like that.

STARK
I hate hospitals. People die in them.

MARLENE
How is your heart?

Stark smiles, turns and types commands into a LAPTOP COMPUTER.

ON THE SCREEN the words, *HOW IS MY HEART?* appear. A black box connected to the computer whines, sending messages to--

INT. PETTING POOL - DAY - AN UNDERWATER MICROPHONE

It squeaks and clicks and whines a well-recognized language to the three dolphins as they dart around the pool.

EXT. PETTING POOL - DAY - ONE DOLPHIN

breaks the surface, nods and squeaks back at a microphone suspended over the water.

ON THE LAPTOP the words *YOU HAVE A BEAUTIFUL...HEART* scroll across the screen.

MARLENE

They understood you!

STARK

I'm trying to develop a technology which will warn them not to swim into fishermen's nets.

MARLENE

Perhaps you should try this strategy on your Board of Directors?

Stark acknowledges the issue with a nod.

EXT. BONSAI GARDENS - MOMENTS LATER - STARK AND MARLENE

walk across the lawn. Carrying a small, leather brief, Marlene patiently waits as Stark, in a bathrobe, raises the handheld VidNotePad with--

STARK

The sonar tests on Molly and Neptune have been promising. Can a similar bio-sensing radar be fitted into the SAV?

(then)

I have five minutes...

MARLENE

Mike thought it safer for me to deliver the contracts personally.

Marlene offers a file folder of papers which Stark scans as they continue walking.

MARLENE

We think Hokaido and his people are being very fair.

STARK

(reading)

It's a pity the board has forced me to come to friends "off-shore."

MARLENE

Bland and his allies have been too quiet. Either they're resting before a big fight or they've given up.

STARK

Bland will never give up.

MARLENE

The San Francisco meeting has been moved up to Thursday. Can you keep that schedule?

Stark looks at Marlene, notices something and grabs her arm, stopping their progress with--

STARK

You have the most mysterious eyes. One's blue and one's green.

MARLENE

Thank you for noticing, Mr. Stark. I was born with them.

(playful)

But be careful...

STARK

Why is that?

MARLENE

Women often use mystery to their advantage.

Stark's face suddenly clouds.

MARLENE

I'm sorry, did I say something wrong?

STARK

No...

(thoughtful)

...after I tried to hide from death in a cave in Tibet, I realized that MYSTERY is the only thing that keeps me inventing.

(then)

I'm sorry I have to run. A meal's been prepared. Eat. Have a massage before you fly back. Take care of yourself...

MARLENE

...good luck.

Stark is gone, and Marlene is left with many feelings about this enigmatic man.

INT. HI-TECH OFFICE - NIGHT - CLOSE ON AN HDTV SCREEN

as an ANIMATED TRIPTYCH SEQUENCE appears.

ON AN ASTEROID'S SURFACE the red and gold IronMan suit pushes piles of rocks near a DOMED CITY backed by glowing stars.

UNDERSEA the suit swims with ease outside a SEALAB POD surrounded by kelp.

IN A NUCLEAR REACTOR the suit handles deadly, spent, glowing FUEL RODS.

STARK V.O.

What you are witnessing is a prototype based on the revolutionary Somatic Amplification Vehicle (SAV). This new technology will give humankind access to the farthest reaches of space, the deepest depths of the ocean and the most toxic environments on this planet.

Standing abruptly in front of the screen is--

MISTER FUJITSU HOKAIDO a short, compact Asian who smiles enigmatically behind thick, dark-rimmed glasses with--

HOKAIDO

A brilliant achievement, Tony. It will change the way we think of the UNIVERSE.

STARK

A small contribution, old friend.

HOKAIDO

Your humility masks deep worry.

STARK

My government is very touchy when it comes to technology leaving its borders. But I have no choice in the matter and must act immediately.

The Asian's face can't suppress a growing excitement.

HOKAIDO

Let me show you something.

INT. HONDA ASSEMBLY LINE - NIGHT - HOKAIDO

walks with his TWO AIDES and Tony Stark along the mainframe conveyor of a vast assembly line past--

THE GIGANTIC HULKS of robotic rollers, spot welders, lifters, laminators, all state-of-the-art construction devices which sit at rest, awaiting a new day of work.

HOKAIDO

These processors can manage
production at 285 degrees Kelvin.

STARK

Very impressive.

HOKAIDO

Retooling for a special product
could be achieved within weeks.

STARK

It sounds like you've already
accepted my offer.

HOKAIDO

Not without hesitation. Some
radical elements in my own country
want to keep East and West
separate for the rest of eternity.

STARK

Perhaps we can reconcile the age-
old differences together?

Hokaido looks at Stark's extended hand.

HOKAIDO

The goddess of mercy has 1000
hands and needs them all.
Together we go forward.

Hokaido offers his own hand. Just as Stark tries to take it--

KACHUG! A GIGANTIC ROBOT ARM springs to life, snatching Hokaido
up into the air.

HOKAIDO

AAAHHHHHH!!!

A RIVETER CRACKLES and swings around, spitting red hot bolts at
Stark, who dives for cover behind the mainframe and--

KERCLANG! A RIVET smokes where Stark's head used to be.

As Stark dives for the metal case, an ASSEMBLY ARM grabs him by
his shoulders and hoists him off the ground.

HOKAIDO

TONY-SAN!!!

Stark wrenches around to see--

TWO GIGANTIC ROBOT ARMS pull at Hokaido like an ancient torture device. His Aides leap ineffectually at his dangling legs. Suddenly, from his blind side--

AIDE #1
GGGAAAAAHHHHHHH!!!

Aide #1 is lifted up by a Robot Arm, shaken violently and tossed like a rag doll across the factory interior--

SMASHING in a dead heap against a wall.

A GIGANTIC PINCER whirls around, snatching up Aide #2 and KERACK! bones crunch as he slumps in death.

Helpless, Stark looks down and sees--

THE METAL CASE resting on the floor, inches from his feet. He slips off his shoes and stretches to his full height, exerting all his strength, until, CLICK! CLICK! and--

TOES HIT THE SNAPS lifting open the lid. The BLACK DISCS are revealed. A BUZZ roars and Stark looks up at--

A RIVETER which has found its target and zeroes in on Stark's head with evil intent. At the last possible moment--

Stark arches his back, slips out of his coat and falls onto--

THE METAL CASE where feet fit snugly into the divots.

A WHIRL sounds as metal un-telescopes, climbing up Stark's legs, covering the calves, knees, thighs, waist, torso, and locking over his shoulders.

KERCLANG! The riveter hits Stark's chest, leaving a SMOKING RIVET in the protective suit. Stark dives with hands open at--

THE BLACK DISC and palms fit into the handprint divots. Again metal WHIRLS and un-telescopes, over hands, up wrists, around forearms and shoulders, to his neck and over his face.

CLOSE ON THE METAL CASE which bends and folds and contracts in on itself, forming a shiny, platinum TRIANGLE.

The Triangle is snapped, CLINK! into an indentation on the suit's chest and start-up sounds whine.

CLOSE ON HUMAN EYES which stare with intensity out from the battle suit of a 21st Century gold and red warrior.

The IronMan leaps into the air, diving forward, smashing--

KERKLANG! into the support beam for the robot arm which holds Hokaido. It crumbles at the base under the direct hit from the IronMan.

KANG! KANG! KANG! The IronMan punches again and again at the base of the Assembly arm which holds Hokaido in its grasp. But it won't let go. The IronMan leaps up to--

THE ROBOT HAND and pries at the metal fingers which crush his friend's limp body, tearing apart metal, shredding the last finger until he finally frees Hokaido.

ON THE FLOOR the IronMan gently lowers Hokaido down. His friend's business suit is soaked with blood. Hokaido looks up with a slowly fading smile and--

HOKAIDO

This is what you American's call,
being hoist on one's own petard?
Sorry about the future, Tony...

He laughs at his own joke and dies.

The IronMan turns away. A moment of distraction and--

KACHUG! a robot arm pushes forward, grabs the IronMan by the leg and dangles him upside down. Another Robot arm reaches out and grabs the IronMan's arm. The two machines pull tight, stretching the IronMan out, as if on a rack.

BUZZZZ! a riveter, like a scorpion, stings the IronMan again and again with RED HOT PIECES OF LEAD.

IN THE SUIT Stark's face is a contorted mask of pain as--

POV - HEADSUP DISPLAY - BUZZ! BUZZ! - The RIVETER hits again and again, striking directly at the protective eyeports. With inhuman strength--

KRONG! the IronMan rips the Robot Arm from its foundations, swinging it in a massive arc, striking--

KERKLANG! the main circuit board of the conveyor line. Everything grinds to a screaming halt. The IronMan leaps to the ground and scans through his--

POV - HEADSUP DISPLAY - The POV searches the factory, spying movement. CLICK! CLICK! CLICK! the grid magnifies three times, revealing an OPERATOR at controls in a booth high overhead.

INT. FACTORY FLOOR - NIGHT - VOOSH!

The IronMan ascends vertically to--

A PLATFORM which sits well above the assembly line. The IronMan looks into a steel-reinforced cage as--

INT. CONTROL BOOTH - NIGHT - THE OPERATOR

wearing a ski mask, hoists himself through a door in the ceiling.

FROM THE PLATFORM the IronMan kicks up toward the roof.

EXT. ASSEMBLY PLANT ROOF - NIGHT - THE SKYLINE OF TOKYO

glows behind the silhouette of the Operator as he runs along the spine of the building. Suddenly--

KERKRANG! and the IronMan rips a hole in the corrugated metal, emerging directly in the man's path. He grabs him by the throat and rips off the ski mask, revealing an ANGLO.

The IronMan dangles the Anglo out over a TEN STORY DROP above a busy Expressway.

ANGLO

Wai... wait! No! I got a call.

(choke, choke)

Don't know who. Told me to kill the Jap.

IRONMAN

Do you think we dream after we're dead?

The IronMan violently shakes the Anglo until his teeth rattle.

ANGLO

Agahggaahhhgahgggaah!

IRONMAN

To be? Or not to be...

ANGLO

Okay! Okay!

(choke, choke)

The guy's name was Bob UNGH--

PHHT! PHHT! PHHT! Three bullets jerk the Anglo's body. He slumps in the grasp of the IronMan, who glances around, searching through--

POV - HEADSUP DISPLAY - The Tokyo skyline is brighter here as segments are framed up and analyzed. Coming into view are--

TWO LOVERS who dance in an apartment.

THREE PUNKS smoke something and spray-paint Japanese graffiti.

TOKYO SHOPPERS stand in front of a toy store displaying the latest transformer toys.

EXT. ASSEMBLY PLANT ROOF - NIGHT - THE IRONMAN

looks down at the dead man, with all of Tokyo at his feet. There is no hint of where the bullets came from.

INT. PRIVATE JET - DAY - TONY STARK

stares down at a photo of Hokaido and a newspaper headline, which reads in Japanese and is translated in a subtitle:

INDUSTRIALIST HOKAIDO ASSASSINATED BY ISOLATIONISTS.

STARK O.S.

Damnit, Mike! They knew what we were doing! We've got ears and eyes where they shouldn't be!

A HUGE VIDPHONE covering one wall of the plane plays the face of Mike Elliot.

ELLIOT (VIDPHONE)

I'm sorry about Hokaido. I know you were such good friends.

(pause)

I'm guessing three months minimum to put something together with anyone else--

STARK

--I want to buy Bland out! Completely!

ELLIOT (VIDPHONE)

I'm not sure you can pull it off. I can scrape together about 420 million and some change, tops.

Stark fumes in the silence.

ELLIOT (VIDPHONE)

(resentful)

I hate the idea of paying Bland twice what he bought our own shares for six months ago.

STARK

The fool doesn't understand that in less than a year my new technology will double what we're paying him for the stock.

ELLIOT (VIDPHONE)
I'll have the buyout paperwork
prepared immediately.

(then)
Tony, I truly am sorry about
Hokaido.

The image of Mike Elliot collapses to a point. The HOLD BUTTON
lights up. Another call. Stark hits it and--

ON THE SCREEN the unwelcome face of Jeremy Bland is backed by
the Stark company logo.

BLAND (VIDPHONE)
Good afternoon, Mister Stark. Can
we speak?

STARK
(restrained)
Is there anything to talk about?

BLAND (VIDPHONE)
Frankly, Tony, you haven't made me
feel very welcome.

STARK
That's not my job.

BLAND (VIDPHONE)
Maybe it should be. Marlene
Fortune tells me you're a decent
enough person.

Stark displays no outward reaction to what has been said.

BLAND (VIDPHONE)
You know, of course, that she and
I communicate on a daily basis...?

STARK
No...

BLAND (VIDPHONE)
A sharp executive. At any rate,
one day you'll realize that I'm
the best friend you NEVER had.

STARK
Get to the point, Bland.

BLAND (VIDPHONE)
I just did... good-bye.

As the screen goes dark, Stark mulls over the cryptic message.

EXT. SKYSCRAPER ROOF - DAY - MIKE ELLIOT

smiles and shakes hands with TWO EXECUTIVES.

ELLIOT

Put in a call to Marlene Fortune
at the Four Seasons. Tell her I'm
running fifteen minutes late.

He waves and steps into a waiting BELL JET RANGER which lifts
from the rooftop, rotoring skyward, when suddenly--

CLOING! THE TAIL ROTOR freezes up and violently breaks off.

THE BELL JET RANGER shudders and begins to spin as a sickening
whine rises in volume. Out of control, it veers wildly and--

KABOOM! with a fiery explosion the helicopter smashes into the
side of a nearby building.

INT. LOBBY - DAY - TOM PYNCHON

smiles and shakes hands with TWO EXECUTIVES, turning with an
AIDE into a plush--

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY - THE AIDE

pushes the down button and the two men wait for the doors to
close. When they do--

KERKLUNK! something lets go, and the two men realize they're in
trouble when--

CLOSE ON FLOOR NUMBERS where the lights go on and off in
descending sequence, faster and faster. The elevator is
falling.

PYNCHON drops his briefcase and braces himself against a wall,
screaming as--

The elevator hits bottom and KERSMASH! the ceiling plunges down
on the men, crushing them horribly.

EXT. SFO TARMAC - DAY - A LEAR JET

with the red and gold SI logo on the tail rolls to a stop. The
door/stair mechanism lowers, revealing Tony Stark.

AT A LIMOUSINE Stark approaches, carrying the metal case. A
UNIFORMED DRIVER, very thin, mirror sunglasses, opens the door
and Stark pauses for a moment with--

STARK
The Four Seasons hotel, please.

DRIVER
Yes, sir.

INT. LIMOUSINE - DAY - STARK

sits into the back seat, turns and comes face to face with--

STEROID, a muscular, peroxide blond with a buzzcut who pins him to the seat with a massive arm as--

DOCTOR BLUE, sinister, fat and balding, leans in close and jabs the wide-eyed Stark in the neck with a HYPODERMIC SYRINGE.

STEROID
(to the driver)
Worm! Let's move it!

EXT. SFO TARMAC - DAY - BLACK-TINTED WINDOWS

whine closed, automatic doors click shut and the limousine roars away from the Lear jet.

INT. FOUR SEASONS HOTEL LOBBY - DAY - MARLENE FORTUNE

sits at the bar, waiting for a man who will never arrive. She glances down. In her hand is--

A NOTECARD with leaping dolphins on the cover and inside, in neat handwriting, the message:

Marlene, I appreciate your loyalty and look forward to our meeting at the Four Seasons Hotel, San Francisco, May 20, one o'clock. Long live the future, Tony.

Behind Marlene is a PHOTO BLOW-UP of the San Francisco skyline.

REGISTRATION DISSOLVE:

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO SKYLINE - DAY - AERIAL

The limousine accelerates, changing lanes onto the Interstate.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DESERT LANDSCAPE - DAY - VULTURES

sit on a barrel cactus as the limousine roars down the road.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HORIZON - DUSK - THE DISC OF THE SUN

hangs over the landscape like a red egg as the limousine glides past a sign announcing the Nevada state line.

EXT. STARK'S MASSIVE FACTORY - NIGHT - WESTLAKE

near a BMW with a cellular phone, signals "thumbs up" to--

A GROUP OF MEN who move toward the entry doors to the factory.

INT. STARK'S MASSIVE FACTORY - NIGHT - JEREMY BLAND

leads the coterie of MEN into the massive room, which falls silent as WORKERS in SI lab coats wonder what the deal is.

Stubin steps forward, brandishing a court order. He is backed up by several gun-toting SECURITY GUARDS.

STUBIN

(reads)

As of this moment, you are all terminated. Collect your severance pay at the door. Anyone found on the premises after eight P.M. today will be arrested.

The shocked workers are herded together by Security Guards as--

A NEW CREW of technicians walk through the interior, making notations on clipboards. At their head is--

DR. RAYMOND RAY, forty, thin, slightly wall-eyed. A studied "yes man", more politician than scientist, his Texas drawl flows easily with--

DR. RAY

Now, a door like this has got to have something interesting behind it.

AT THE MASSIVE DOOR Jimmy, the loyal Security Guard, pats his gun as the group approaches.

JIMMY

Mr. Stark gave me strict orders not to let anyone into--

STUBIN

--you got strict orders to GET OUT OF THE WAY!

The new Security Guards put hands on weapons, and Jimmy sees he is out numbered. He steps out of the way as--

A WELDER fires up an ARC AIR SLICE PAK and proceeds to cut into the obstruction.

Frederick McLuhan whispers something into Jeremy Bland's ear and the sinister takeover artist's laugh echoes through the massive interior.

INT. "SKUNKWORKS" - NIGHT - THE DOOR

falls inward off its hinges with a CLANG! Fluorescent lights flicker to life as Dr. Ray steps through the smoldering opening. Behind him Bland and the others peer in.

DR. RAY

The man is like Picasso with a garage full of masterpieces.

(then)

There are more inventions here than IBM, Wang and Sony could come up with in a decade.

BLAND

I knew we were sitting on major real estate here!

THE WARFARE ROBOT PROJECT sits in a pool of flickering light.

DR. RAY

My, my, my. I would not want this thing to be mad at me.

A stream of workers flows in through the door, spreading out, tagging items, examining benches.

Jeremy Bland strolls through the room, passing--

A COFFIN-SIZED CHAMBER which sits in its own cubicle. Bland studies the odd device with--

BLAND

Perhaps Tony Stark was a vampire?
And he hid from the sun in this?

DR. RAY

(approaches)

Looks like a cryo-chamber. Uses liquid nitrogen to freeze the living in a form of extended sleep.

Bland shivers, shrugs and walks on. He passes--

A RACK where WALKMAN-LIKE HEADSETS with EYECAPS hang from pegs.

Bland picks up a headset, examines it and, instinctively, fits it on top of his head. He snaps down the Eyecaps. But nothing happens. He shrugs and starts to take it off, when--

SEXY WOMAN O.S.

Jeremy?

Bland is startled, not sure he heard anything.

SEXY WOMAN O.S.

Oh, Jeremy Bland? What would it take to turn you on?

Bland looks around the room. Can anyone else hear her voice? No. Now he freezes. What he sees--

POV - VIRTUAL VISION - A BOLT of electricity, a CLAP of thunder and HEATHER II materializes, in a sheer black teddy, ringed by a pink glow. She purses her lips, blows a kiss and the husky-sexy voice comes out of a body from a wild fantasy.

HEATHER II

Such a BIG, STRONG man. Want to take a peek at something exciting?

BLAND

Right here? Right now?
(to empty space)

Where'd you come from? How'd you know my name?

HEATHER II

I know a lot of things about you, Jeremy.

Bland yanks off the headset, a mixture of amazement, surprise and guilt on his face. He glances around, but Heather II is gone, and no one has noticed his encounter.

Dr. Ray steps up to the rack of headsets with--

DR. RAY

These must be Virtual Reality headsets the government contracted Stark to build for their test pilots. Gives one the experience of being somewhere one isn't exactly at.

BLAND

Is that a fact?

As Dr. Ray wanders through the lab, Jeremy Bland discreetly slips a headset into his pocket, making sure no one notices.

THE BARE ROOM - DAY OR NIGHT - A LIGHTBULB

hangs over the slumping form of Tony Stark, who is tied to a chair. Steroid paces, flexing muscles, as Doctor Blue works over a tray crowded with DRUG AMPULES and HYPODERMIC SYRINGES. In one corner, the Worm chain-smokes, his mirrored sunglasses hiding an expressionless face.

STEROID

Hey, doc, did I ever tell you
about the guy who taught his
asshole to talk?

(lifts Stark's
unconscious head)

Yeah, it was quite unlike anything
I have ever heard.

DOCTOR BLUE

Has he passed out again?

Doctor Blue comes up with a syringe which he pokes under the skin of Stark's forearm, sending clear liquid into a vein.

DOCTOR BLUE

You know, with one of my new
recipes I could make your mother
screw Godzilla.

Steroid throws a nasty look at Doctor Blue.

DOCTOR BLUE

Oh, I forgot. You don't have a
mother.

The drug kicks in and Stark rouses, coughing, mumbling, rolling his head around.

DOCTOR BLUE

Mister Stark...?

TONY STARK'S POV -- In an exotic wide angle that rocks back and forth like a ship at sea, Doctor Blue leans in close, acting friendly, like Mr. Rogers on a Saturday morning kidvid.

DOCTOR BLUE

Well, where were we? Weren't we
talking before about old
girlfriends? Do you remember what
happened...?

STARK

...the-the-then I had the heart
attack... I couldn't get close...
to anyone... after... spent more
time alone... in... in virtual
reality.

DOCTOR BLUE

Virtual what? What reality?

STARK

Reality... the company... got to
turn this around... the money...
Marlene... she lied to me... uhn.

And Stark passes out again. Doctor Blue huffs, sighs and
throws up his arms, gesturing into a full-length mirror at one
end of the room.

INT. SURVEILLANCE ROOM - DAY OR NIGHT - WESTLAKE AND STUBIN

stand next to a locked-off VIDEO CAMERA which is aimed through
one-way glass.

WESTLAKE

Did you get that part about
Marlene?

STUBIN

Yes. Looks like he subconsciously
bought Bland's lie.

Westlake reaches for an intercom with--

WESTLAKE

Give him another shot--

STUBIN

--easy.

WESTLAKE

Aren't we on a schedule here? I
assumed we'd videotape for 48
hours and then terminate him.

STUBIN

Let's make sure we get everything
we need.

WESTLAKE

Agreed.

(into the intercom)

Wake him up, doc. But be careful.

AT A TABLE a TECHNICIAN watches intently as--

CLOSE ON STARK'S METAL CASE tiny metal shafts click the case's tumblers through various combinations, trying to crack the locks while--

LEDS in boxes positioned over the case tabulate the various three number sets as they are attempted.

INT. BARE ROOM - DAY OR NIGHT - CLOSE ON STARK'S ARM

A needle jabs a vein near other red puncture wounds.

INT. PENTHOUSE - DAY - CLOSE ON A TELEVISION

The grizzled face of Tony Stark stares blankly, like an automaton, with--

STARK TV

So I was up by four A.M. The swim, the run, half a grapefruit with three blueberries. Decafe. Three bottles of Geyser Peak spring water. International calls for an hour...

DOCTOR BLUE TV O.S.

...then what? Tony! What next?

STARK TV

Six or seven hours in the lab... The one place I could truly express myself.

Jeremy Bland swivels a chair and jerks a thumb at the TV set.

BLAND

You getting all this?

A MAN with his back to Bland watches the drugged Stark.

MAN

Yes, sir, Mister Bland.

BLAND

Come here and let me take a closer look.

As the Man moves closer, Bland grabs his head with both hands and closely inspects his face.

BLAND

A great job. Now all you have to do is act the part.

Bland pats a cheek and pushes the Man away, revealing his face. It is an ACTOR who looks exactly like Tony Stark.

ACTOR STARK

But four in the morning? On
decafe? The guy's a boy scout.

Bland jabs the Actor Stark in the chest with a finger.

BLAND

Wrong! He's the CEO of a major
company! You're a big shot now,
so start ACTING like it.

(offers a paper)

Here's your speech in honor of the
dead board members. Memorize it.
And tonight I want you to find out
what was between Marlene Fortune
and Tony Stark.

ACTOR STARK

Between? All right. Is she cute?

BLAND

Hey, you're the actor. If you
want to show her your OSCAR, I
don't think anyone would mind.

The Actor Stark laughs lecherously and rises to leave, but
Bland halts him with--

BLAND

Before you go, Mr. Stark, check
this out.

And Bland holds out a SMALL, BLACK BOX with a recessed button.

ACTOR STARK

(taking the box)

Looks like a security beeper. For
Tony's penthouse?

The Actor Stark is about to push the button when--

BLAND

DON'T DO THAT!

Shocked at Bland's reaction, he hands back the box with--

ACTOR STARK

Sorry. What is it?

BLAND

When we gave you the new face, I had the doctors install an insurance policy. You put in a bad performance, I push this and KABLOOEY! your head explodes.

Bland is the one who is laughing now as the Actor Stark stares in horror at the box with the finger hovering over the button.

INT. "THE FOX HOLE" - NIGHT - A LOUD DISCOTHEQUE

where hordes of fashion beasts wander around.

AT A DOOR Marlene, purse in hand, holds back, noticing--

IN A PRIVATE BOOTH above the dance floor as the Actor Stark sniffs cocaine from a plunger-dispenser vial.

MARLENE O.S.

Hi.

ACTOR STARK

(hides the vial)

Hello. Ready to do some dirty dancing?

The Actor Stark blows his nose into a crumpled handkerchief.

MARLENE

But, Tony, can your heart take that much physical activity?

ACTOR STARK

My doctor gave me a clean bill of health only last week.

(more intimate)

Besides, you make me feel physical.

The Actor Stark gets close and Marlene leans back with--

MARLENE

Excuse me, but I think I need some fresh air.

INT. MOVING LIMOUSINE - NIGHT - THE ACTOR STARK

stifles a sneeze and pops a bottle of Dom Perignon, overfilling two glasses as Marlene stares out the window at the city.

STARK

What's the problem, Marlene?
Something I said?

MARLENE

I'm just trying to get used to the idea of you and Jeremy Bland doing business together.

ACTOR STARK

Oh, he's not such a bad guy. He did give the company a lot of money.

The limousine glides to a halt, and the Actor Stark is more intimate with--

ACTOR STARK

Would you like to come upstairs for an aperitif?

MARLENE

(polite)

Well, uh, I'd love to, but--

ACTOR STARK

--we could have some fun?

MARLENE

Fun? Mr. Stark, I'm afraid I misunderstood. I thought you wanted to talk about your company's future?

ACTOR STARK

Oh, Marlene, we only go around once in life. Why wait for the FUTURE?

That word, the *FUTURE*, used so inappropriately by the Actor, rocks Marlene. She reaches for the door handle with--

MARLENE

I should be going.

The Actor Stark's arm has snaked around Marlene's neck. Very close now, Marlene is forced to look into his insincere face.

ACTOR STARK

You should lighten up a little...

(notices something)

...such interesting eyes. One blue and one green. Is it natural?

Now it's official. Marlene realizes he is not the real Stark.

MARLENE
(flippant)
No, they're contacts...
(then)
...good night, Mr. Stark.

Marlene forcibly pushes the Actor off her, throws open the door of the limo and walks away without looking back.

INT. "SKUNKWORKS" - DAY - THE BEARDED FACE OF TONY STARK

drugged but lucid, appears on a video monitor which Dr. Ray scrutinizes with undivided attention.

STARK TV
It was extraordinary. All of space/time was mine. I've never felt such power. My entire body was engaged in this Virtual Reality.

DOCTOR BLUE TV
But you said there were problems.

STARK TV
It was a world I wanted to inhabit all the time, and after months I began to have psychotic episodes. I was suffering from Radical Empowerment Syndrome. I no longer cared about the real. Virtual reality was so... addictive and exciting--

Jeremy Bland reaches in and punches a button, freezing Stark's image mid-expression with--

BLAND
Addictive and exciting. Virtual reality! Think of it! It could be bigger than television!

DR. RAY
Remarkable. Tony Stark made himself the guinea pig of his own imagination.

BLAND
(a lightbulb goes on)
Doctor! How many headsets are there in this factory? I want to stage a demo for the stockholder's meeting next week.

DR. RAY

But what about the psychosis
problem? This Radical Empowerment
Syndrome sounds dangerous to me.

BLAND

Rubbish! Cigarettes are dangerous
but people still smoke them.
We'll put a little warning label
on the side of each unit. That
should satisfy the government.

DR. RAY

Too bad Mr. Stark was unable to
mix his appetite for invention
with a taste for money.

Bland strides around the sleeping hulk of the Warfare Robot
Project with--

BLAND

It takes REAL genius to do that.
In this room alone there must be
millions in untapped revenues.

(surveys WRP)

Why we haven't even taken a crack
at this. What's it called?
Warfare Robot...

And Bland slaps the Warfare Robot Project. The tiny tremor
from Bland's slap makes WRP shift it's weight with a massive--

WRP

GAAAHHHH!!!

Bland leaps back in fright. Dr. Ray nods in amusement. Both
men laugh a little too loudly.

INT. SURVEILLANCE ROOM - DAY OR NIGHT - CLOSE ON THE LED

over one combination of the metal case. It holds steady at
#186, and the snap is open. The other LED continues to tumble
through a sequence as the metal shafts try new combinations. A
phone rings and--

The Technician glances at his watch, cradling the phone
receiver under his chin and labelling another videotape with--

TECHNICIAN

Hello?

(telephone squawk)

Okay, I'll tell them.

INT. BARE ROOM - DAY OR NIGHT - THE TECHNICIAN

leans past the Worm, dragging a thumb across his throat with--

TECHNICIAN

Boss says, terminate him.

Doctor Blue draws a clear liquid out of a glass ampule into a hypodermic syringe with--

DOCTOR BLUE

I'm surprised he lasted the 48 hours.

Steroid shivers at the sight of the hypo.

STEROID

I'm gonna grab a burger. How about you, Worm?

THE WORM

I'm not hungry, but you know I like to watch you eat.

DOCTOR BLUE

Can't stand this part, can you?

STEROID

No. What of it?

DOCTOR BLUE

So tough on the outside, but so weak under all that rippling flesh. Next time get a job with Amnesty International.

STEROID

Hey, you're just jealous of my superior physical attributes.

DOCTOR BLUE

Chemical-aided, I might add.

STEROID

What God made, I improved on.

Stark's eyes flutter. Can he hear what his tormentors say?

DOCTOR BLUE

Don't be gone long. You still have to dump the body.

(taps the syringe)

Potassium and tap water. Occurs naturally in the body and stops the heart muscle in seconds.

Steroid shivers again, puts on a tight-fitting, sharkskin jacket and, signalling the Worm, they leave the room.

INT. SURVEILLANCE ROOM - DAY OR NIGHT - STERIOD AND THE WORM

leave through a side door as the Technician loads stacks of videotape into boxes. The LED counter continues to click through its search as--

THROUGH ONE-WAY GLASS Doctor Blue sweeps all evidence of his interrogation into a black, leather bag. We hear a sharp CLICK! and--

THE OTHER LED has stopped at #121. SNAP! and the latch opens. The Technician steps up to the unlocked case. Curious, he lifts the lid and stares in at--

THE BLACK DISCS with their impressions of hands and feet.

The Technician reaches out with both hands and places his open palms inside the divots. Nothing happens. Then he pushes harder and--

TECHNICIAN

What the...?

A WHIRL as metal un-telescopes, leaping over hands, up wrists, forearms, shoulders, and around the Technician's neck. The suit has a life of its own. The Technician stumbles backwards staggering around the room as SAV thruster jets hiss.

INT. BARE ROOM - DAY OR NIGHT - DOCTOR BLUE

leans over Stark, ready to push home the fatal shot, when--

KERASH!!! the Technician plunges through the one-way mirror, dragged along by the SAV's wrist thrusters.

TECHNICIAN

Help meeeeeee!

And just as suddenly--

KERCRUNCH!!! the half-suited Technician punches through the opposing wall and out into--

EXT. LAS VEGAS STREET - NIGHT - THE TECHNICIAN

acts like a 4th of July fireworks display gone berserk, rocketing down mainstreet, between--

LINES OF CARS, soaring above the heads of--
PEDESTRIANS, and finally going ballistic over--
THE SKYLINE and disappearing into the starry night.

INT. BARE ROOM - NIGHT - DOCTOR BLUE

his deadly hypodermic syringe poised over Stark's arm, can't believe what he has just seen.

CLOSE ON TONY STARK as his eyes flutter and snap open. Stark focuses on the world around him. A moment of clarity. He grabs Doctor Blue's wrist and jabs the hypo under the skin on the fat man's other arm.

DOCTOR BLUE

OUCH!

The chemical kicks in and Doctor Blue clutches his chest, eyes bulging, waves of pain rolling through his body.

Stark staggers to his feet as Doctor Blue coughs and moans and slumps to the ground, dead of a heart attack.

EXT. LAS VEGAS STREET - NIGHT - TONY STARK

stumbles through the jagged hole made by the out-of-control SAV and confronts the clot of curious TOURISTS drawn to the wreckage. Unsteady, he blends into the crowded city streets of the Las Vegas night as--

STEROID AND THE WORM push their way to the jagged opening in the building's wall. They survey the wreckage as a police SIREN whails, getting louder.

STEROID

What the fuck happened!

THE WORM

I'll deal with the cops! You cover up this mess! Nobody can know Tony Stark was EVER HERE!

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT - IS IT A COMET?

No, it's the out-of-control Technician. He angles over the horizon and KERSMASH!!! plows into the ground. Silence. In the settling dust--

METAL TELESCOPES as the SAV retracts away from the Technician's shoulders, withdraws down the length of his body, removing itself from his waist, legs, ankles and finally his feet, becoming--

A BLACK DISC which sits innocuously in the sand.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. JACUZZI ROOM - NIGHT - JEREMY BLAND

dressed in a monogrammed, silk robe, drops an olive into a shaken martini and fires up a huge CIGAR, contentedly exhaling smoke with--

BLAND
To the victor belongs the
spoils...

Bland picks up a VIRTUAL REALITY HEADSET and secures the hi-impact, black plastic device on his head. He snaps down EYECAPS and takes a sip from the martini with--

BLAND
...I'm waiting.

POV - VIRTUAL VISION - The empty room fills with a CRACKLE! of energy, a CLAP! of thunder and behold, HEATHER II materializes like Venus on the half-shell. The pink glow surrounding her body makes the black teddy she is wearing transparent.

HEATHER II
Hello, Jeremy.

BLAND
Heather....
(recovers)
Before we start, I'd like to know
something. How was it with Tony
Stark?

HEATHER II
Jeremy, you're so much more MANLY
than Tony Stark ever was.

BLAND
I love to hear you say that!

POV - VIRTUAL VISION - Heather II saunters forward with swaying hips, pendulous breasts and moistened, ample lips.

HEATHER II
So? What can I do for you
tonight?

BLAND

The blond ambition program is my favorite.

HEATHER II

All right. But why don't we go a little further this time? Why not go around the world?

BLAND

That's what I like about you, Heather. Safest sex in town, and we don't have to talk when it's over.

Bland reaches out into thin air.

POV - VIRTUAL VISION - Heather II is very close, expectant. The lover's hands meet in space. Virtual ecstasy.

INT. JACUZZI ROOM - MOMENTS LATER - AT A DOOR

Westlake and Stubin peek in and see--

Bland, alone, on his back, still wearing the Virtual Reality headset. Hair mussed, his robe in disarray, he puffs vigorously on a cigar and appears to be talking to himself.

BLAND

I have always felt that POWER is the ultimate aphrodisiac. The real TURN ON. My appetite is HUGE. I could CONSUME the whole world. Oh, Heather, you make me HUNGRY for more.

At the door, Westlake and Stubin remain tentative with--

WESTLAKE

Should we disturb him?

STUBIN

Yes. This is an emergency.

WESTLAKE

...Mr. Bland?

As they step closer, Jeremy sits up, losing control with--

BLAND

I WANT TO CONSUME THE ENTIRE WORLD!

WESTLAKE AND STUBIN

JEREMY!

Bland shudders, yanks off the Virtual Reality Headset and stares blankly up at the two senior VPs with--

BLAND
WHAT! WHAT! What's going on!
(comes to his senses)
What the hell are you doing here?

Flustered and red-faced, Bland stumbles to his feet with--

BLAND
This better be pretty Goddamned good!

WESTLAKE
Tony Stark has escaped.

Bland purses his lips, suddenly calm, analytical as--

STUBIN
(relaxed, confident)
The deprogrammer we hired was using a drug which induces amnesia.

WESTLAKE
(in control)
He won't remember who he is for at least forty-eight hours.

STUBIN
All we have to do is find him before the drug wears off--

BLAND
(realization)
--and he remembers who he is?!?
(goes ballistic)
You IDIOTS!

Stubin and Westlake cower in the shadow of Bland's rage.

BLAND
WELL! WHAT ARE YOU DOING ABOUT THIS!

STUBIN
Our people are checking John Doe files and missing persons reports.

WESTLAKE
We're monitoring police channels--

BLAND

--THAT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH! I want round-the-clock surveillance on the actor! And put someone on that Marlene Fortune bitch! If Tony Stark is alive, she could lead us to him!

Bland gets close to Westlake and Stubin with a terrifying leer.

BLAND

I want him dead! DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME! DEAD! And I need proof! I want you to bring me his body! IN TINY LITTLE PIECES!
(flicks his wrist)
Now get out!

Westlake and Stubin move quickly for the door, glancing over their shoulders. And they are gone.

AT THE BAR Jeremy Bland swigs a gulp of vodka, calms himself, picks up the Virtual Reality Headset and places it, slightly askew, on top of his head with--

BLAND

Heather! Heather...! Where are you?

POV - VIRTUAL VISION - A CRACKLE! of energy, a CLAP! of thunder and HEATHER II is back with--

HEATHER II

Poor, little Jeremy. Too much stress. Let me make it all better.

EXT. ARTURO'S CONSTRUCTION YARD - DAY - A NON-DESCRIPT SEDAN

pulls to a stop near a row of CEMENT MIXERS which tumble their heavy loads in huge, angled vats mounted on trucks. Steroid gets out of the sedan and casually walks past--

A CONSTRUCTION WORKER with big tattoos on his forearms who watches as--

Steroid tosses the metal case SPLOOCH! into the opening of one of the mixer's vats where it slips beneath the surface of FRESH-MADE CONCRETE.

As Steroid leaves the site, he palms the Worker a wad of money.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY - A CEMENT TRUCK

with the name ARTURO'S CONSTRUCTION written on the door, whines up next to a BULLDOZER which grinds down mountains of freshly dumped earth. Nearby, wooden frameworks for new, two story houses are hammered together by an army of CARPENTERS.

The truck backs up, stops and the Construction worker angles around the REAR-MOUNTED SLURRY, aiming a flow of wet cement into the wooden channels of a house foundation.

A SIGN sitting on the edge of the huge site reads:

PLEASANT VALLEY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
WHY NOT STAY AND GROW WITH US?

EXT. DESERT PLATEAU - DAY - ROAD RUNNERS IN HEAT WAVES

Then, far off, the shape of a man, distorted, walking with no apparent destination in mind.

ACROSS THE DESERT FLOOR the SHADOW of the man wraps around rocks and bushes as he continues through the barren landscape.

CLOSE ON TONY STARK, his face dripping sweat, lips parched, breath short, eyes vacant, an amnesiac in the wasteland.

INT. TONY BLAND'S OFFICE - DAY - MARLENE FORTUNE

enters as the Actor Stark, feet on the desk, watches a SOAP OPERA on a television. He notices her presence and takes his feet down, attempting some demeanor of leadership.

MARLENE
(offering a brief)
These need to be signed.

ACTOR STARK
I'm NOT SORRY about last night.

MARLENE
Then let's get something STRAIGHT between us. My contract expires in six months. I work weekdays, nine to seven, and if you touch me, I'll file a sex discrimination suit against you so fast you won't know what hit you.

The Actor Stark, intimidated by this display, quickly signs the documents. Over his shoulder, Marlene peers at the writing as she holds up--

THE NOTE CARD with the leaping dolphins on the cover and the signature, TONY, with a flourish inside. She squints at--

THE ACTOR BLAND'S SIGNATURE, which is a messy scrawl, nothing like the clear, neat writing on the card.

CLOSE ON MARLENE as a chill goes up her spine.

INT. OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER - MARLENE

stands silently in a doorway near a plaque with the name MIKE ELLIOT written on it. A SECRETARY packs boxes with file folders and books. It's a sad, silent moment.

Marlene glances down at Elliot's phone call log and nearly jumps out of her skin with--

MARLENE

When did this call come in?

SECRETARY

(confused)

Which call?

Marlene is across the room in an instant, shoving the log book into the Secretary's flustered face.

SECRETARY

This morning. About eight o'clock. Why?

MARLENE

(out the door)

Nothing. Call the airport. Get me on the first plane to Las Vegas.

INT. BLAND'S MASSIVE FACTORY - DAY - A DANCE BAND

works through a jazzy rendition of *SUMMERTIME*. Spread throughout the large room are--

STOCKHOLDERS dressed in everything from suits to shorts, who laugh and sip Chardonnay.

INT. BACKSTAGE - DAY - THE ACTOR TONY STARK

paces, mumbling and glancing repeatedly at a speech. Several BOARD MEMBERS approach, surprising the Actor Stark when they slap him on the back with--

CHAMBERS

Tony Stark, how the hell are you?

FORSYTHE

Quite a maneuver you pulled,
coming around to Mr. Bland's point
of view like that.

MCLUHAN

You know, Tony, you seem more
relaxed than I've seen you in a
long time. What's her name?

Everyone laughs.

ACTOR STARK

(sniff, sniff)

These martinis are delicious...

AT A DISTANCE Jeremy Bland furrows his brow.

CHAMBERS

I thought you quit drinking, Tony?

ACTOR STARK

I did? That's right, but--

BLAND

(into their midst)

--but Tony's trying on a new life
style. And I think it's an
improvement.

BOARD MEMBERS

(as a group)

So do we!

BLAND

Excuse us, gentlemen, but It's
time for the stockholders to meet
their CEO.

Leading Stark away, Bland turns suddenly vicious with--

BLAND

I know the drinks are free, but
COOL IT!

ACTOR STARK

Hey! So I'm a little uptight.
How do you expect me to feel with
a BOMB planted in my head?

INT. BLAND'S MASSIVE FACTORY - DAY - THE CURTAIN PARTS

and Jeremy Bland steps up to a podium, looking out at--

THE GROUP OF STOCKHOLDERS who respond to Bland's presence with mild applause.

BLAND

Ladies and gentlemen, when genius
and commerce get married, what
kind of kids do they have?

(pauses for effect)

That's right... MONEY. Today
Stark International casts an eye
on the 21st century. But you
don't want to hear boring details
from a businessman. Let's meet
the real genius behind it all...
TONY STARK!

The curtains part, catching the Actor Stark downing another martini. The Stockholders greet the impostor with warm applause.

BLAND

I think he's more thrilled than
you can imagine.

(forced control)

Over here, Tony.

AT THE PODIUM the actor Stark clears his throat, glances at an angry Bland and launches in with--

ACTOR STARK

First there was the VCR. Then the
television, the CD recorder, high
definition radio- uh... I mean TV.
But you haven't seen anything yet,
folks. Yes sirree!

(peaks at speech)

And now. Look. On the horizon.
A new age. Of entertainment. And
play. And fun. Ladies and
gentlemen, I present with undue
humiliation... Virtual Reality.

(loses his place)

Where are those girls? C'mon out.

And from behind the curtains stream--

A DOZEN VANNA-LIKE MODELS circulate among the Stockholders, passing out Virtual Reality Headsets.

ACTOR STARK
(applauds vigorously)
Lovely. That's right, girls.
Don't miss anybody.

The Stockholders are still confused as--

ACTOR STARK
Now put those headsets on and snap
down the eyecaps.

The Stockholders slowly get the idea and slip the headsets on,
flipping down the eyecaps as--

The Dance Band hits the first chords of a lush, Muzak rendition
of Bob Dylan's *BLOWIN' IN THE WIND* and--

CLOSE ON A STOCKHOLDER who rocks back and forth on the balls of
his feet, as if skiing, while in--

POV - VIRTUAL VISION - *POWDERZONE* - We rush down a pristine
slope, slewing around moguls, leaping mounds of snow,
traversing a smooth wall of white powder.

CLOSE ON A STOCKHOLDER as he hunkers down, teeth clenched,
pumping his legs in a running motion as--

POV - VIRTUAL VISION - *'NAM* - In a grainy, newsreel-type
environment, we leap from a foxhole, making a dash for cover as
bullets hit all around and a huge explosion rocks the senses.

CLOSE ON A STOCKHOLDER as she smiles sensually, her hands
rising up to embrace--

POV - VIRTUAL VISION - *DAVID II* - Straight off the runway at
Chippendale's, wearing speedo briefs, pumped up, greased, he
grinds his hips and licks his lips.

INT. BLAND'S MASSIVE FACTORY - DAY - ONE HUNDRED STOCKHOLDERS

stagger around, stand still, responding and reacting to the
various programs of Virtual Reality.

ON THE STAGE Jeremy Bland flashes that greedy grin.

INT. BLAND'S MASSIVE FACTORY - LATER - STOCKHOLDERS

ties loosened, shirts unbuttoned, hair mussed, talk among
themselves, excited and amazed. Their attention is drawn to--

Jeremy Bland and Dr. Ray who raise their hands, silencing the
vigorous applause with--

BLAND

Ladies and gentlemen, now that you have experienced virtual reality, you realize what a demand there will be for this amazing, new product.

(then)

Questions? Answers? What do you think?

STOCKHOLDER #1

I'll do ANYTHING to get a hold of this product.

STOCKHOLDER #2

It's great stuff. Very compelling.

STOCKHOLDER #3

As a shareholder, I can't wait for the dividends.

A flurry of applause.

STOCKHOLDER #4

What about live broadcasts?

DR. RAY

(points at headset)

A good question. Please note that each unit has an antenna built in, for worldwide satellite transmissions of live events.

BLAND

We're negotiating with top athletes in all sports. Users will be able to play the games with the professionals.

The Stockholders are even more impressed. From the back--

STOCKHOLDER #5

I agree with everything everyone is saying. But I have three kids. What about the toy market?

Bland and Dr. Ray are taken off guard but--

IN THE CENTER OF THE ROOM the Actor Stark, now completely drunk, improvises with--

ACTOR STARK

Toy's, toys, toys! Look 'round
you. Thish is the playpen of
t'morrow.

(staggers)

Ferg't Sony, ferg't Fuji. Right
back here in the good ole U. S. of
A. we're gonna be num'er one all
over ag'in.

BONK! the Actor Stark bumps into the hulking mass of the
Warfare Robot Project. He recovers and stares up at the
sleeping beast with--

ACTOR STARK

Now here's a toy 'f there ev'r was
one!

Bland and Dr. Ray share a pained look, but--

AROUND WRP the Stockholders swarm, pointing, impressed,
interested. The Actor Stark basks in the attention with--

ACTOR STARK

Tell ya' what. Kids're gonna jes
love this. 'Cause it'll scare the
livin' bejeesus out of 'em.

Bland moves in for damage control with--

BLAND

Thank you, Tony.

(improvising)

But you shouldn't let the cat out
of the bag on our research
projects.

STOCKHOLDER #1

Wait a minute. Tell us. My kid
would buy a toy like that.

STOCKHOLDER #2

Yeah, what's the secret? My kid
loves robots.

BLAND

We've got the entire leisure
division working on the toy
problem even as we speak.

The Stockholders applaud with a vigor which borders on mania,
slap Bland on the back and shake his hand.

EXT. DESERT - DAWN - AN AIRBORNE POV

swoops low over the bleak landscape.

INT. HELICOPTER - DAWN - MARLENE

squints into the sun as rotor blades whip the warming air.

EXT. DESERT - DAY - POV THROUGH BINOCULARS

Sheriff WINSTON FARLEY, young, rough, friendly, stands next to his police car. The POV whip-pans to Marlene who concentrates, as their VOICES sound in radio-enhanced amplification.

SHERIFF FARLEY

That's right. The Coroner put the death at about five hours ago.

MARLENE

But back up. What was it you said he found next to the body?

SHERIFF FARLEY

This right here...

And Sheriff Farley holds up the BLACK DISC. It's the one that removed itself from the Technician. Marlene takes this mysterious technology in both hands.

EXT. DESERT - DAY - THE WORM

peers through huge, military BINOCULARS which are supported by a mini-pod, sitting on the hood of a Chevy Blazer. He wears headphones which are plugged into a RADIO DISH ANTENNA.

MARLENE O.S.

What do you think happened here, sheriff?

THROUGH THE POV the Sheriff shakes his head and shrugs at Marlene with--

SHERIFF FARLEY

A few ole boys was sayin' it reminded 'em a' one a' those UFO abductee cases. 'Cause there's no way in hell this guy coulda walked through those badlands. Either this body was dumped here or he flew hisself.

Marlene shades her face from the sun as she scans the forbidding landscape.

EXT. MUSTANG, NEVADA - DAY - A ONE-SLOT-MACHINE TOWN

population 18, with its three buildings on the interstate.
Prominent among them is--

INT. JAKE'S BURGERS - DAY - CLOSE ON A TELEVISION

Two entertainment reporters, CHRISTY NICHOLS, blond, tan energetic and CULVER WASHINGTON, handsome, black, athletic, are backed by a bustling newsroom as a title, *WHAT WILL THEY THINK OF NEXT?* supers over.

CULVER

What will they think of next?

CHRISTY

The people at Stark International
are trumpeting the ultimate toy
this summer.

CULVER

It's a new technology called
Virtual Reality.

Over the reporters' shoulders, in a VIDEO WINDOW, appears a now familiar Virtual Reality Headset.

A GUM-CHEWING WAITRESS leans on a counter, bored to hell, as an OLD LADY plays the slot machine in this greasy spoon.

A FAN grinds noisily as--

IN THE CORNER a FLY buzzes around Tony Bland's head. A five-day growth covers a face which stares vacantly into space.

ON THE FLOOR a BOY, six, plays with a pile of toys which include Ninja Turtles, RoboCop and other transformers.

LITTLE BOY

CHGCHGCHGCHG. Go get 'em,
RoboCop! Leonardo is gonna knock
your block off!

The waitress approaches Stark with--

WAITRESS

Hey, mister, you okay? How 'bout
another lemonade?

Bland's eyes flutter as he nods, YES.

CLOSE ON THE TV as Christy continues her report with--

CHRISTY TV

...and making a rare, public appearance, recluse-billionaire Tony Stark, founder and owner of Stark International, who had this to say...

The Actor Stark appears on the screen, living it up with--

ACTOR STARK TV

And now. Look. On the horizon. A new age. Of entertainment. And play. And fun. Ladies and Gentlemen... Virtual Reality.

IN THE CORNER the little Boy steps up close, looking quickly from the TV to the real Tony Stark. This is confusing.

Suddenly Stark stands, clenching his fists.

The little Boy gets scared and runs back to his pile of transformer toys.

CLOSE ON STARK as irregular breathing ensues and he struggles to form a word. The waitress arrives with another lemonade.

WAITRESS

Hey, mister, that really you on the TV?

STARK

(with power)

I... am... Stark!

CLOSE ON THE TV, all smiles, the two reporters sign off with--

CHRISTY

I wouldn't mind saying hello to DAVID II.

CULVER

All right, Christy! This is Culver Washington...

CHRISTY

...and Christy Nichols asking, "WHAT WILL THEY THINK OF NEXT?"

EXT. MCCARRAN AIRPORT - DAY - LOTS OF COWBOYS

mix with generic, out-of-town TOURISTS coming and going from the Las Vegas terminal.

Tony Stark, eyes clear, in command of his senses, approaches--

AN AUTOMATED TELLER where he types in commands.

ON THE SCREEN instead of a normal printout of requests, strange mathematical and computer syntax symbols chug by as the machine responds to the commands of a supreme intellect.

BEEPS and CHIRPS come from the ATM. With a flourish, Stark finishes and steps back. Suddenly--

THE ATM spits twenties like a slot machine gone berserk. Stark catches the bills, turns and enters--

INT. MCCARRAN AIRPORT - DAY - STARK

examines the FLIGHT BOARD, searching for a ticket line, when he is shocked by the sight of--

MARLENE FORTUNE who shakes hands, nodding to Sheriff Farley and SEVERAL DEPUTIES. They turn and leave the airport.

Stark plows through travellers, trying to catch up to Marlene, who checks her ticket, her watch and seeks out--

THE LADIES ROOM where Marlene pushes through a door marked ENTRANCE before Stark can get to her. He leans against the wall, impatient, but always the gentleman. To his surprise--

THE WORM tosses a cigarette butt and, not recognizing Stark in his beard, brushes past him and steps into the Ladies Room.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY - MARLENE

at the mirror, pauses a moment from freshening up and turns toward the partition that separates the entrance door from an entry corridor. Did she hear something? The rising SOUND OF A JET comes through an open window. Marlene goes back to her makeup as--

INT. ENTRY CORRIDOR - DAY - THE WORM

finishes screwing a SILENCER onto his GLOCK 19 handgun. The jet noise rises in volume. The Worm steps around the corner of the partition that separates the entry corridor from the bathroom, taking aim, when--

HANDS grab him from behind, yanking him backwards.

Tony Stark and the Worm struggle as the jet noise rises more and more. The Glock 19 waves this way and that, bullets spitting PHHT! PHHT! PHHT! into the smooth walls.

Marlene finishes her make-up job, snaps closed her purse and checks her face one more time as--

Stark and the Worm wrestle with the gun between them. As the Worm opens his mouth, screaming, what comes out is the ear-splitting noise of the jet. The Worm's body jerks twice.

In front of the mirror, Marlene checks her watch as--

Stark lets go of the Worm's slumping body, stumbles to regain his footing and leans around the partition. Marlene is gone.

INT. MCCARRAN AIRPORT - DAY - STARK

runs out of the EXIT door, past several women who eye him suspiciously. He catches sight of Marlene as she steps through a METAL DETECTOR on her way to the boarding gate.

INT. "SKUNKWORKS" - DAY - AT A SWITCHING STATION

MANY TECHNICIANS in white lab coats labor meticulously over meters and dials as--

A DIRECTOR, tan, hyper, all teeth, addresses the crowded room.

DIRECTOR

Okay, we're taking it from Round Six. Makeup! More blood and spritz him down real good. I want it to look like somebody stomped on this man's face with a boot!

The man they are talking about is--

A BLACK BOXER who looks like he has been beaten badly in the ring as a MAKEUP ARTIST provides the finishing touches. He takes off his silk robe and steps into--

THE VIRTUAL REALITY CHAMBER, a conical room composed of thousands of lenses, all pointed inward. Bright lights come on, illuminating the area as the Director steps close with--

DIRECTOR

Okay, Bone Crusher, you're tired and your ass has basically been demolished, but like all true champions, you've got that fire of intensity, that COMEBACK spirit that won't quit. Now, for me babe, kick some ass.

(to the crew)

All right, let's make sure the camera grid is inter-locked. And... roll tape!

The Boxer strikes a pose, flexing and jabbing as--

AT THE STATION the Technicians work feverishly while--

BANKS OF 1 INCH TAPE RECORDERS roll in sequence and--

IN THE VRS CHAMBER Bone Crusher throws uppercuts at an invisible opponent, feigns being hit in the nose and grunts his role of toughness.

FIFTY MONITORS, forming a huge wall, play back the different angles of the cameras recording the action.

BEHIND THE STATION Jeremy Bland nods his approval to Dr. Ray as an ASSISTANT approaches with--

ASSISTANT

The focus group is waiting, Mr. Bland.

Walking across the large space--

BLAND

Remember, Doc! Kids LOVE bad guys. They're much more fascinating than some mush-mouthed hero. So, if we create the right kind of super-villain, we've got a chance to HOOK the kids real good.

DR. RAY

Well, let's find out what the little rug rats really want, and I'll put something together.

A DOZEN KIDS, aged six to ten, sit patiently on the floor in a circle as Dr. Ray approaches with--

DR. RAY

Hello, boys and girls. Did you have fun watching how we make a Virtual Reality Tape?

KIDS

(as a group)

YES!!!

DR. RAY

We've asked you all to come here to make a new toy, and you're going to help us decide what it's going to look like.

If any of the Kids were bored before, Dr. Ray has their attention now. He walks up to an ABSTRACT SHAPE covered by a canvas sheet.

DR. RAY
Now, I'm going to show you
something, and I want your honest
opinion about it, okay?

The Kids nod, curious, excited. And with a flourish--

Dr. Ray yanks off the sheet, revealing the hulking shape of the
Warfare Robot Project. Silence.

DR. RAY
Well? What do you think? Isn't
it... scarey looking?

One kid drums his fingers. Another yawns and stretches out to
nap. Another holds his nose against an imaginary bad smell.
Three others jerk their thumbs down. A unanimous negative.

Bland gets upset and silently urges Dr. Ray to do something.

DR. RAY
What's the problem?

KID #1
That's not scarey. It's just a
stupid hunk a tin.

KID #2
I got all the transformers.

KID #3
I got the turtles.

KID #4
I got the robot police.

KID #5
Give us somethin' we never seen
before.

KID #6
Like the monster that hides in my
closet at night.

DR. RAY
Well, that's what I want you to
tell Damian here. Tell him what
you want to see.

DAMIAN the cyberpunk, dark, matted hair in a bowl cut, sits at
an over-sized, one million pixel HDTV display console, an
ELECTRONIC PAINTBRUSH clutched in his hand.

DR. RAY
So? What scares you? C'mon.

KID #1

It's gotta be big and mean and the
strongest thing you could ever
think of...

KID #2

Like a cross between Arnold
Schwarzenegger and the devil...

KID #3

Yeah, with real huge wings...

KID #4

And... and... sharp teeth and a
long tongue and two mouths. It's
gotta have two...

KID #5

And it could spear people with
really gnarly claws and arrows...

Damian works furiously with the electronic paintbrush,
interpreting the tapestry of fear which the kids describe.

KID #6

It has to breath fire and have
really bad breath...

KID #7

Yeah, and it's voice should sound
like... like... like my uncle who
smoked a million cigarettes...

KID #8

And its gotta have the right
kinda...

(struggles)

...pers-a...pers-a...pers-a--

DR. RAY

--personality?

KIDS

(together)

YEAH!

KID #9

It's gotta have an ATTITUDE!

DR. RAY, curious about the progress, glances over Damian's
shoulder at the screen. Upon seeing Damian's rendering, he
smiles at the group of kids with--

DR. RAY
Were you thinking of something
that looks like this?

Dr. Ray spins around--

THE HDTV SCREEN and it is frightening. A Geiger-like portrait of a winged, man-beast, Samurai, technobot gargoyle. It carries spears, lightening bolts, sports two mouths, lined with razor-sharp teeth, massively constructed arms, an over-pumped chest, all sitting on top of huge, horse-like legs with cloven hoofs. If evil were incarnate, this would be it.

KIDS
(in virtual toyland)
WOW! KILLER! RADICAL! WAY COOL!

Jeremy Bland has never been happier in his entire life. Dollar signs actually appear in the black pupils of his eyes.

EXT. FACTORY PERIMETER- NIGHT - A FIGURE

in an overcoat steps up to the hurricane fence, peering at--

FACTORY DOORS where SECURITY GUARDS carry Uzi submachine guns and survey the grounds.

AT THE PERIMETER Tony Stark disappears in shadows.

EXT. ROOF - NIGHT - STARK

hunched over, lopez along, stopping near a SKYLIGHT.

BLAND'S POV - The hulking shape of the Warfare Robot Project sits in the middle of the room. But something is very different about his invention. Surrounded by--

INT. "SKUNKWORKS" - WELDERS, SCULPTORS, PAINTERS, TECHNICIANS

who crawl all over a scaffolding, the WRP is being re-tooled to look like Damian's rendering.

CLOSE ON WRP'S HULL which has been shaped to accommodate WINGS. A massive DOUBLE JAW with razor-sharp teeth is hoisted into place. SPEARS are loaded into a scabbard slung low over one shoulder. In reality it is more horrific than the artist's rendering.

EXT. ROOF - NIGHT - AT THE SKYLIGHT

Stark watches with growing concern as he assesses the current state of his kingdom. Then he sees something which makes him want to leap through the glass.

INT. "SKUNKWORKS" - NIGHT - AT THE HATCH

which reads *BIO-CORE ASSEMBLY*, a Technician on a ladder inserts the now familiar METAL CYLINDER into the behemoth's mechanized intestines. He slams shut the hatch, screwing flush-mounted bolts tight.

IN FRONT OF THE SCAFFOLDING Jeremy Bland and the Actor Stark circle the ambitious operation.

ACTOR STARK

I'm going to call my invention the
FALLEN ANGEL. The wings of a
beast, the spirit of evil--

BLAND

(sarcastic)
--cool it, Shakespeare.

ACTOR STARK

I resent that attitude, Jeremy. I
am the head of this company, you
know.

BLAND

You want to run that by me again?

ACTOR STARK

I am Tony Stark. You work for me.

Bland grabs the Actor's cheek, pinching too hard.

ACTOR STARK

Ouch! Hey, that hurts.

BLAND

That's beautiful. I like the
performance.

(a vicious whisper)
Just remember what's under all
that reconstructed tissue. A two-
bit, unemployed off-off-Broadway
understudy....

(then)
...with a bomb in his head!

Bland seethes, but controls his reaction as Dr. Ray approaches.

DR. RAY

Jeremy, Tony, welcome. What do
you think?

BLAND

Tony and I were just discussing...
a NAME for this marvellous
creation.

DR. RAY

The technicians have nicknamed it
VRMN. That's short for Virtual
Reality Monster.

BLAND

Vermin! I LOVE IT! The most
sophisticated villain ever offered
to the youth of America!

ACTOR STARK

(rubs his cheek)

What's going on over there?

A BUNDLE OF WIRES leading from the back of the monster plunges
into a Cray computer.

DR. RAY

We're programming VRMN with the
anti-social behavior of the most
menacing villains in history.
Conquerors, insane emperors, war-
mongers, terrorists... Right now
we're down-loading Genghis Kahn.

IN A SOUND PROOF BOOTH an actor who looks like Wallace Shawn
but sounds like John Houston reads from a book, *The Meditations
of Genghis Khan*.

ACTOR

...late at night, after we made
our camp, I would instruct my
warriors to round up our captured
enemies and order them to lie down
in a field. Then we would lay
planks across the captives to form
a floor. And my warriors would
jump up on the floor, which rested
on the captives, which were
crushed into the ground beneath.
And the screams of the captives
was the music which my warriors
danced to. HAHAAHA!

BLAND

I've got it! The perfect ad
campaign. "Go on a rampage
tonight with VRMN."

A Technician runs up and whispers something to Dr. Ray who nods and grabs a microphone with--

DR. RAY
(amplified)
Will everyone clear off the
scaffolding please?

The scurry of activity further reveals VRMN's horrific visage.

DR. RAY
(amplified)
Carlos, Fred, Robby, feed that
last bit into the computer and
route it to VRMN for me, will you?

CLOSE ON 1 INCH TAPE as rewind sounds search for a cue.

AT THE SWITCHING STATION Dr. Ray puts his hands on two DIALS with meters above them. He twists the dials and for a moment--

LIGHTS DIM in the cavernous interior and everyone looks at--

VRMN whose massive hulk creaks and groans, moving for the first time in this new incarnation. Sound begins to come from--

VRMN'S TWO JAWS which move, slightly out-of-sync, making the words ghost each other in an eerie double-echo of ear-splitting bombast and cruelty.

VRMN
...and the screams of the captives
was the music which my warriors
danced to. HAHAHAHA!

The massive wings extend, and for a moment VRMN looks like it will lift off the ground, casting a shadow over--

THE CROWDED ROOM and everyone gasps, shudders, draws back in awe. With a huge metal moan--

VRMN slouches to rest, the final laughter of the Actor's voice echoing through the massive factory.

THROUGH THE SKYLIGHT a look of horror grips the real Tony Bland's face. He knows what this monster is capable of doing.

EXT. ROOF - NIGHT - STARK

breathes ragged. Suddenly there are chest pains, then a cough, a gasp, and Stark slips, sliding down the sloping roof, at the last moment grabbing--

A RAIN GUTTER, the corrugated metal keeping Stark from plunging fifty feet below to--

THE GROUND where a Security Guard hears something and points his flashlight up the side of the building.

ON THE ROOF the beam of the flashlight passes just over the crouching Stark who painfully pulls himself to safety.

EXT. SUTTON PLACE - NIGHT - A HARD RAIN FALLS

Tony Stark stands in the downpour, looking up at--

SILHOUETTES in windows. It's Bland's penthouse and a party is in progress.

INT. PENTHOUSE - NIGHT - TEN ACTRESS/MODEL/WHATEVERS (AMWS)

fawn over the Actor Tony Stark, the most available bachelor in town, as the chic party progresses. Among them is Marlene Fortune, who plays the part as well as any of the other women.

ACTOR STARK

...then I told her I'd be happy to sleep with her, if she passed a physical with my doctor.

And the crowd of AMWs laugh with forced sincerity.

AMW #1

You know, Tony, you're so good looking. Have you ever thought about a career in acting?

The irony is not lost on the Actor Stark as--

AMW #2

(nods)

Who's that, Tony?

Steroid, dressed in Armani black several sizes too small, hovers at a discrete distance.

AMW #3

He gives me the creeps.

ACTOR STARK

When you're as popular as I am, you're bound to inspire jealousy, hatred, envy. My advisors tell me I've received some death threats. They thought a bodyguard would be appropriate.

The AMWs fawn with increased delight over the man of the hour.

MARLENE

Another drink, Tony?

ACTOR STARK

Why, thank you, Marlene. Listen, I'm glad you decided to come to my party. For a while there I was afraid you'd stopped liking me.

MARLENE

(to the AMWs)

What's not to like?

Marlene walks away with the Actor Bland's martini glass.

INT. PENTHOUSE KITCHEN - NIGHT - MARLENE FORTUNE

holds the martini glass up to bright light, examining a smudged fingerprint.

CLOSE ON SCOTCH TAPE which Marlene lays across the glass, carefully lifting off the evidence. Suddenly--

THE DOOR OPENS and Steroid steps into the room. Marlene barely has time to hide the glass behind her back. She fumbles, trying to peel off the tape as--

STEROID

(suspicious)

Doing a little house cleaning, Miss Fortune? Is there anything I can help you find?

MARLENE

Some privacy, if you don't mind. Mister...?

STEROID

My friends call me Steroid.

MARLENE

Did your mother give you that name?

Steroid grunts and hulks toward Marlene. She walks backward and runs out of room, leaning against a counter, struggling to pull the tape from the glass.

STEROID

...you got something to hide from Steroid?

Suddenly the Actor Stark waltzes into the kitchen with--

ACTOR STARK
Marlene. Where's that drink?

The glass slips from Marlene's grasp KERASH! breaking on the floor. Marlene quickly moves away from the counter, brushing past Steroid with--

MARLENE
Your bodyguard was about to do
just that. He likes his martinis
very DRY, Mister Steroid.

The bevy of AMWs bursts into the kitchen, forcing Steroid to the far wall. The excited women crowd around the Actor Stark as Marlene makes her exit.

EXT. PENTHOUSE - MORNING - A DISHEVELED AMW

stumbles down the steps, breaking a high-heel, cursing and looking up at the building with--

AMW
You bastard! My name's SHERRY!
Not MARY!

And she limps up the street.

EXT. BLACK DOOR - MORNING - A HAND

pushes the bell and muted chimes sound through the Penthouse. Footsteps pound as--

ACTOR STARK O.S.
I expected you to come back and
apologize. I can't remember the
name of everyone who crosses my
doorstep.

The door swings open revealing the--

ACTOR STARK
Oh, my GOD!

SMACK! the Actor is punched, square in the face with a clenched fist. He goes down.

INT. PENTHOUSE BATHROOM - DAY - HANDS

lay out an expensive RAZOR and SOAP DISH, turn on the hot water and lather up a SHAVING BRUSH.

IN THE MIRROR the real Tony Stark says to his bearded image--

STARK
...welcome home.

INT. STARK INTERNATIONAL - DAY - THE 40TH FLOOR

Jeremy Bland paces in front of a VIDEO TELEPHONE MONITOR which covers one wall of this opulent office. On the screen is the bitchy EMMA FIELDS, a senior editor for Time/Warner.

BLAND

What do you mean Lars won't give me the cover? My ex-wife gives him more than good slope in Vail every winter!

EMMA TV

Jeremy, we've got the Pope and his lover, the new oat bran scandal, a real cure for baldness, geriatric sex. What can I tell you. We're TIME MAGAZINE. You've got to offer me something... special.

BLAND

Emma, do you want everyone in your office to know you have genital herpes?

The silence is quite tangible.

EMMA TV

(recovers)

Would three weeks be too late?

BLAND

Make it two. Ta, ta...

CLICK! And the video-telepresence of Emma Fields collapses to a point of static.

BLAND

Camille? Get me Tony Stark on the Vid, now!

Jeremy Bland's hand TREMBLES. He runs his finger over the clean, black contours of a Virtual Reality headset which sits nearby as the sexy laughter of HEATHER echoes from tiny speakers. It's all Bland can do to keep from putting it on.

BLAND

(to himself)

Not yet, darling. It's a little early in the day...

ON THE VIDEO SCREEN an image shimmers and brightens and the real Tony Stark towels off his freshly shaved face with--

STARK

Jeremy Bland. What a pleasant surprise. How are you?

BLAND

Shut up and listen. I got you on the cover of *TIME*. I'm going to prepare a statement, and I want you to memorize it.

STARK

Jeremy, since I am the REAL Tony Stark, I think I should speak for myself--

BLAND

--hey! I told you to cut this crap! You're Freddy Luschitsky! Not Tony Stark!

STARK

Oh, but a method actor must LIVE the part, Mister Bland--

BLAND

--I'm not ASKING you to LIVE it. I'm TELLING you to ACT it!

STARK

Jeremy, the public wants ME on the cover of *TIME*, not you--

BLAND

--YOU FUCKING IDIOT!

Bland blows a fuse and throws a paper weight at --

THE VIDEO TELESCREEN and it's liquid crystal surface shatters into a thousand pieces.

INT. RECEPTION ROOM - DAY - CAMILLE

reads a magazine as what sounds like a gorilla dismantling its cage comes from within Bland's office. Westlake and Stubin stroll into the room, nod at Camille and move for the massive oak double doors.

CAMILLE

I wouldn't go in there if I were you.

STUBIN

Another fit?

Camille only nods.

WESTLAKE
That's the third one this week...
(to Stubin)
...the intercom.

STUBIN
(punches a button)
Jeremy? It's Bob and Bob.

The sounds of destruction stop and the massive oak doors open with a CLICK!

INT. BLAND'S OFFICE - DAY - WESTLAKE AND STUBIN

step into the room. What they see--

The office has been totally destroyed. Bland stands in the middle of the wreckage, chest heaving, eyes bulging, pushing repeatedly on the recessed button in the LITTLE, BLACK BOX.

BLAND
Your! Brains! All! Over! The!
Walls!

STUBIN
Excuse us... Mr. Bland?

WESTLAKE
The operator has to be within 100
feet for the radio transmission to
work.

Bland tosses the box to Stubin with--

BLAND
You hired him! You kill him!

WESTLAKE
Who? Tony Stark?

BLAND
No! That fucking actor!

STUBIN
But, Mr. Bland, we're so close to
unveiling the new product line.

BLAND
What better way to introduce the
genius's last masterpiece? The
death of Tony Stark will grab
headlines all over the world. Do
you grasp my meaning?

WESTLAKE

But, Mr. Bland. You just can't
kill him. This will take some
planning.

A shudder goes through Bland's body and his face begins to
twitch uncontrollably. Westlake and Stubin are uncomfortable
in the silence.

STUBIN

Mr. Bland...?

WESTLAKE

We were talking about the actor...
We strongly council against
killing him at this time.

BLAND

Oh? You do...?

Suddenly, Bland rises to a fury unseen before with--

BLAND

I CAN KILL ANY-GOD-DAMN-BODY I
WANT TOO!

Bland charges Westlake, grabs him by the chest, lifts him off
the ground and shoves him across the room, heading toward--

KERASH!!! the now-familiar floor-to-ceiling windows. They
shatter and Westlake takes a forty story tumble. Bland smooths
his hair and straightens his tie, feeling much better.

BLAND

Mr. Stubin, I want you to draft a
suicide note for your ex-friend.
But first kill that fucking actor!

STUBIN

...yes sir.

And Stubin is out of there, quick.

BLAND

(into the intercom)
Camille! Will you please call
maintenance! I'm having problems
with that damn window again.

And like a man under the dark spell of some addictive drug,
Bland reaches for the Virtual Reality Headset. SNAP! the
eyecaps come down with--

BLAND
Heather! It's TIME!

PUSH IN CLOSE on Jeremy Bland who giggles with delight. Moving into the blackness of the EYECAPS--

BLAND
Oh, Heather! I LOVE THIS PART!!!

POV - VIRTUAL VISION - Heather wears a cowboy hat, red, white and blue pencil thin panties and pasties, her long silky-blond hair swept by the wind. She streaks across a star-filled sky, mounted on top of a CRUISE MISSILE which ejects a foamy exhaust, smiling and waving with--

HEATHER
Coming, Jeremy.

INT. PENTHOUSE - DAY - DING! DONG!

Stark studies the attractive but preoccupied face of Marlene Fortune on the BANK OF SECURITY MONITORS.

INT. PENTHOUSE - LATER - MARLENE

nervous but poised, betrays no trace of recognition as she sits on a couch in front of the real Tony Stark.

STARK
The reason I invited you over this morning was to apologize for my recent behavior.

MARLENE
(surprised)
Accepted.

STARK
Then I have been acting strange lately?

MARLENE
Uh, no, I mean...

STARK
Is something wrong?

A suspicious Marlene, keeping her eyes off Stark, stands with--

MARLENE
It's just that I have such a busy morning. I'd better go.

Marlene moves quickly for the door but is cut off with a sideways maneuver by Stark, who gets close.

STARK
What is it, Marlene?

MARLENE
(makes a decision)
You're NOT Tony Stark.

STARK
I'm not?

MARLENE
I've been watching you, mister.
You and Bland and that Steroid
character.

STARK
Those are very serious charges.
Let me get this right. You are
accusing me of being an impostor?

MARLENE
Yes! And I'm going to the police.
Right now. You can't stop me.

Marlene crouches in a karate stance, ready to defend herself.

STARK
Wait!
(holds up his hands)
I think going to the police is a
good idea. Get my coat. We'll go
together.

MARLENE
...what?

STARK
Just go to the closet and get my
coat!

The force of the man's voice convinces her to move to--

THE CLOSET where a flustered Marlene throws open the door and
looks down on--

THE ACTOR STARK whose cries are muffled because he is bound and
gagged with expensive silk ties.

MARLENE
(dawning awareness)
Did you want the cashmere or the
cotton?

When she returns with the coat, Marlene looks up at the real Tony Stark. Impulsively, she throws her arms around his neck, giving him a wet, sexy kiss. When they part--

MARLENE

So, this is the REAL Tony Stark?

INT. BLAND'S SPORT'S CAR - DAY - THE REAL TONY STARK

drives like a madman along the Hudson Expressway. Marlene opens a briefcase, revealing the BLACK DISC found on the desert floor next to the dead Technician.

MARLENE

I didn't know what it was, but the minute I saw it, I knew it was something only you could create.

(looks at Stark)

Are you all right?

Stark rubs his chest, feeling uncomfortable.

STARK

I need the suit... it's my lifeline.

CLOSE ON THE DISC as Bland's hand slides a recessed switch along the rim of the disc and the GLOBE OF THE EARTH appears, super-imposed neatly within. Blinking somewhere inside Nevada is a red light.

Stark moves the switch again and a GRID expands. The state of Nevada is foregrounded as the light continues to blink.

STARK

Looks like they dumped the case near where I was deprogrammed.

Stark lays on the horn, squeals tires and changes lanes with--

STARK

I hope we're not too late.

MARLENE

Too late for what?

STARK

The fools. That thing they're calling VRMN is a killing machine with an I.Q. off the scale. When it realizes there's an army of loyal followers waiting for commands in virtual reality? The entire world is at risk...

Stark pulls the car to a stop in front of a TERMINAL at JFK.

STARK

I'll be back in twenty-four hours.
These people are ruthless. Take
care of yourself.

MARLENE

I thought I was doing a pretty
good job of taking care--

Stark interrupts Marlene with a lingering kiss full of passion.
Breaking from the embrace, Stark gets out of the car with--

STARK

Don't bother looking for a gas
tank. The paint is solar-
sympathetic. It charges the
batteries.

INT. PENTHOUSE CLOSET - DAY - THE ACTOR STARK

has loosened the gag enough to gnaw at the silk ties which bind
his wrists.

INT. PENTHOUSE HALLWAY - DAY - THE CLOSET DOOR

flies open and the Actor Stark falls on his face. He stands,
trips and falls, whimpering. His legs are stiff and asleep,
but he manages to get to his feet when he hears DING! DONG! He
looks down at--

THE BANK OF SURVEILLANCE MONITORS within which Steroid smiles
and holds up several bottles of champagne.

ACTOR STARK

(to himself)

I never thought I'd be glad to see
your ugly mug.

INT. PENTHOUSE ENTRANCE - DAY - THE ACTOR STARK

throws open the door with--

ACTOR STARK

Where the HELL were you? I just
spent the last two hours tied up.
And you know by who? GAAHHH!!!

The Actor backs away in horror. What he sees--

With an evil smirk Steroid holds up the LITTLE, BLACK BOX. His
muscular finger hovers over the recessed button.

ACTOR STARK
NO! WAIT! I--

KERSPLAT!!! White walls, berber carpet and Italian leather all become richly accented with a RED addition.

STEROID
(looks away)
Yech! What an awful mess!

EXT. DESERT - DAY - AN AERIAL POV

Swoops down on a car which speeds along the Interstate.

RADIO V.O.
Recluse billionaire industrialist
Tony Stark died of a brain
aneurism today in New York city.
A spokesperson for Stark
International announced that the
company's immediate plans would
remain intact.

EXT. HOUSING TRACT - DAY - AN ALAMO RENTAL CAR

pulls to a stop at a turnout above thousands of similar-looking
units, satellite dishes, barbeques, swimming pools, barking
dogs. Life's a holiday on--

PRIMROSE LANE as the Rental Car drives through the
neighborhood.

INT. RENTAL CAR - DAY - TONY STARK

splits his attention between driving and checking--

THE RED DOT which flashes on the SAV disc.

Stark pulls the rental car to a stop and shakes PILLS out of a
PRESCRIPTION BOTTLE. He swallows them dry and rubs his chest,
fighting the growing pain.

EXT. TWO STORY COLONIAL - DAY - *THE LYNCH'S*

is written on a mailbox, a RANGE ROVER is parked in the
garage, and identical GOLDEN RETRIEVERS scratch identical fleas
as Tony Stark, carrying a leather briefcase, steps to--

THE FRONT DOOR and knocks. BILL LYNCH, thirtysomething, polo
shirt and shorts, answers with--

BILL
Hi. Bill Lynch. Can I help you?

BOY O.S.
Who is it, dad?

Jimmy Lynch, seven, wearing a *GO ON A RAMPAGE WITH VRMN* T-shirt, pokes his head through his dad's legs with--

JIMMY
It's not the IRS again, is it daddy?

STARK
No, young man, but I would like to talk to you about your house.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY - SARAH LYNCH

tawny, blond, aerobicized, shoots a worried look at husband Bill as Jimmy and his sister, TIFFANY, a prim and perfect nine-year-old, try not to stare at--

THE OPEN BRIEFCASE which holds many bundles of ONE HUNDRED DOLLAR BILLS.

SARAH
But, honey, we just moved in last week.

BILL
I know that, dear.
(to Stark)
I don't know what to say.

STARK
You're a shrewd negotiator, Mr. Lynch. If half a million is too low, you give me a number.

BILL
You mean, just to walk away? Now? Without even packing?

Bill shoots a confused look at Sarah who tries to believe this stranger in her living room is for real. Stark tries not to show it, but the pain in his chest is growing.

SARAH
Mr. Stark, we have a lot invested in this house, emotionally and spiritually. The neighbors are wonderful. We have a passion for the architecture. The school system is one of the finest in the state--

STARK
--how about one million dollars?

JIMMY
(eyes light up)
My school sucks, mom.

TIFFANY
(swallows her gum)
I hate the neighbors.

BILL
(jumps to his feet)
I don't know who you are, mister,
but you just bought yourself a
house!

Stark ignores Bill's out-stretched hand and parts curtains, signalling to someone in the front yard. Sarah steps up next to Stark and looks out for herself. What she sees--

TWO BIG BULLDOZERS, belching black fumes, lurch across the lawn, their jagged shovels lowered at--

INT. LYNCH HOUSE - DAY - STARK

swallows more pills and leans against the window sill.

SARAH
Are you all right?

STARK
(weak)
I suggest you retrieve anything of
value to you... now.

SARAH
You really meant five minutes?

Stark only nods, and the Lynch family launches into the grab-all-you-can-in-five-minutes spree through their own house.

IN THE BACKYARD Jimmy tugs at the leashes of the two Golden Retrievers.

IN THE REC ROOM Tiffany sloshes water from a bowl filled with two goldfish.

IN THE DINING ROOM Sarah juggles armfuls of porcelain English dogs, angelic saints and pastoral settings.

IN THE DEN Bill lugs a STRONG BOX full of family papers in one hand and a BIG 35 INCH TV in the other. He spies something and throws down the TV, scooping up a Virtual Reality Headset labelled HEATHER III.

EXT. TWO STORY COLONIAL - DAY - THE LYNCH FAMILY

struggles across the front yard with armfuls of possessions as the two bulldozers plow directly into their former house.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY - THE JAWS

of the bulldozers scoop out pieces of wall and chunks of floor.

A CLOCK chimes, trembles and falls from the mantel as the Bulldozer's hungry jaw takes another swipe. Wood and concrete and carpet and furnishings are demolished in a noisy heap.

EXT. TWO STORY COLONIAL - DAY - A GROWING CROWD

aproned HOUSEWIVES, HUSBANDS with tennis rackets and KIDS, many wearing VRMN T-shirts, watches the structure bite the dust.

CROWD #1
A million dollars?

CROWD #2
I heard it was five.

CROWD #3
I'd do ANYTHING for five million dollars.

THE BULLDOZER'S JAW brims over with wrecked house as--

CLOSE ON BLAND'S FACE, contorted by pain, he sees what he's been looking for and waves to the Operator of the Bulldozer.

THE METAL CASE is dumped into a pile at the center of the destroyed house.

AMID THE RUINS Stark stumbles as he picks up the metal case, looks around at the Crowd, the Wrecking Crew and realizes he needs privacy. The chest pains have him doubled over as he opens a door to--

INT. JIMMY'S BEDROOM - DAY - STARK

enters the only room left standing. Shafts of light angle in where parts of the roof are pulled away. POSTERS of SUPER-HEROES and shelves cluttered with TOYS dominate the room.

CLOSE ON THE CASE as the snaps open, revealing the BLACK DISC with its foot impressions.

Stark barely has time to set the other DISC inside the case when his body goes rigid, frozen in excruciating agony.

STARK
...no! NOT NOW!

But Stark's heart has stopped. His face drains of all color and he falls forward, at the last second twisting his body toward--

THE METAL CASE where Bland's hands press into the snug indentations of the discs and--

A WHIRL of metal un-telescopes around Bland's hands, wrists, arms and chest.

CLOSE ON BLAND'S EYES which flutter open, gaining strength.

CLOSE ON BLAND'S FEET which step into the foot impressions.

A WHIRL of metal un-telescopes up Bland's legs.

CLOSE ON THE METAL CASE as it bends and folds and contorts itself into the compact triangular command disc module.

CLINK! and the module fits into the access port on the red and gold chest of--

THE IRONMAN who stands in the middle of the room as propulsion jets cough exhaust. He BLASTS through Jimmy's ceiling.

EXT. FLATTENED COLONIAL - DAY - THE CROWD

stunned and amazed, points at the IronMan as he rockets skyward over the Pleasant Valley suburbs.

CROWD #1
What's that?

CROWD #2
I don't know.

CROWD #3
Was it that stranger?

CROWD #4
It looked like some kind of...
Iron Man!

INT. SAV - DAY - POV THROUGH HEADSUP DISPLAY

Desert landscape, mesas, buttes and mountains roar by in a rush as readouts update constantly.

INT. STARK INTERNATIONAL FACTORY - DAY - BLEACHERS

are packed with thousands of excited FAMILIES, holding balloons, wearing GO ON A RAMPAGE WITH VRMN T-shirts.

VENDORS pass through the multitude, handing out promotional VRS HEADSETS.

BEHIND THE STAGE Bland is confronted by Dr. Ray who waves a headset in his face with--

DR. RAY

There's a problem, Mr. Bland! The warning labels were never put on the individual units--

BLAND

--that's not a problem. I ordered them left off.

DR. RAY

But, Mr. Bland, what about radical empowerment syndrome. You gave me your word that--

BLAND

--you MAKE the bomb, doc! Let me DROP it!

Bland leans very close to Dr. Ray's face, his eyes pinched into hideous slits.

Dr. Ray pulls back, horrified by Bland's emotion and logic.

ON A STAGE backed by a 50' X 50' JVC VIDEO SCREEN with the logo SI centered on it, Jeremy Bland, in his element, enjoying the power, steps to a MICROPHONE, raising his hands, quieting the crowd with--

BLAND

(amplified)

Welcome, everyone.

(pauses for effect)

Nobody knew Tony Stark better than I did. In these last few months we became like brothers. And if Tony was here today, he would be very happy to see all of you out there in the stands, and watching on your headsets at home, enjoying his last creation.

(with flourish)

Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls, I present you the most awesome event since the beginning of entertainment...

INT. VIRTUAL REALITY CHAMBER - DAY - A SHROUD

lifts up away from a hulking shape.

IN THE BLEACHERS the Crowd gasps.

VRMN, the winged, technobot, Samurai warrior, raises a muscular arm and waves. APPLAUSE thunders from the audience.

BLAND

At this time, will everyone please
put on their complimentary Virtual
Reality headsets. And witness the
WORLD OF VRMN!

Jeremy Bland nods toward--

A CONTROL BOARD where Dr. Ray reluctantly turns to mixing knobs
and amplifier switches as--

IN THE BLEACHERS thousands of crowd members follow instructions
and put the Virtual Reality headsets on, snapping down the
Eyecaps. A dramatic hush follows.

FROM SURROUND-SOUND SPEAKERS a tribal drumbeat booms and echoes
through the vast space as--

ON THE JVC SCREEN an airborne POV passes through flames, as if
descending into an inferno of black clouds. A familiar VOICE
fills the air with--

VRMN V.O.

In the beginning there was chaos.

A VOLCANO spews rivers of molten lava. The burning mountain
transforms through clay-like animation into--

A TRIBAL MASK which contorts in aboriginal fear, and out of the
eyes roil--

CLOUDS which move in fast motion, parting to reveal--

SOLDIERS IN ARMOR clashing on a rain-soaked battlefield as--

A HORSE rears back and falls on its haunches, dying in muddy
agony while--

A FUSILLADE OF SPEARS fly through the air and skewer--

A SEA OF MEN who die from impalement.

VRMN V.O.

And mankind tried to control the
chaos.

EXT. BLEACHERS - DAY - PANNING THE CROWD

Everyone wears a headset and reacts to the immersion in Virtual Reality. Kids love it, Men are awed and several Women swoon.

ON THE SCREEN HEAPS OF SKELETONS roll down the side of a hill and--

CROWS caw as they stretch their wings and fly over--

CROWDS OF PEOPLE who run for cover, glancing over their shoulders in fear.

VRMN V.O.

But the chaos has returned!

EXT. STAGE - DAY - CLOSE ON VRMN

It grins and drools, its immense, wart-covered double tongues smacking against two pairs of deep purple lips.

AT THE PODIUM Bland hears heavy breathing and glances over at the Techno-Beast.

CLOSE ON VRMN'S CHEST - Ports open revealing dual speakers which kick out the amplified sound of--

VRMN

Hello, my warriors. Are you ready
to follow your master to the edge
of hell?

AT THE CONTROL PANEL Dr. Ray shakes his head and turns to an Assistant with--

DR. RAY

What's going on here? I didn't
program this!

IN THE BLEACHERS the Audience digs the sounds as--

ON THE STAGE VRMN carries on with his own agenda.

VRMN

It is time to destroy the world!
It is time for the chaos to
return. It is time for VRMN to
rule! I command and you obey!

Dr. Ray knows something is wrong and jumps up onto the stage, waving his arms over his head with--

DR. RAY

Stop it! This isn't right! Turn
it off!

AT THE CONTROL PANEL the Technicians twist dials with a frenzy but nothing happens.

ON THE STAGE Dr. Ray stands before the drooling VRMN with--

DR. RAY

Now, see here, you over grown...
GRK!

VRMN snatches Dr. Ray into the air by his heels, swinging him round and round, pile-driving him into the floor of the stage.

VRMN

Die! Insect!

IN THE BLEACHERS the Crowd whoops it up. This is all in good fun. They think it's part of the act.

But Jeremy Bland knows better and dashes for cover as--

TWO SECURITY GUARDS crouch and draw their guns, aiming, BOOM!
BOOM! BOOM!

VRMN giggles and heaves two spears from scabbards VORP! VORP!--

Piercing the bodies of the two guards, who squirm, pinned to the stage on stakes.

IN THE BLEACHERS several in the crowd faint. Some stand, taking off their headsets, not sure if this is all real or not.

ON THE STAGE VRMN laughs like Sam Kinnison on nitrous oxide and belches a plume of fire that reaches the first row of--

THE BLEACHERS where many in the crowd are having their doubts. Confusion builds as some try to leave, others want the show to continue. Several kids cry, some women scream, men shout, as--

ON THE STAGE VRMN spreads giant wings, flaps them furiously, rises out of the Virtual Reality Chamber and swoops low.

OVER THE BLEACHERS VRMN passes close enough to breath a foul stench on the faces of the crowd. Now it's official. The Crowd panics as everyone runs in sheer terror.

EXT. BLAND'S MASSIVE FACTORY - DAY - VRMN

giggles as it sits on its haunches next to the SI logo above--

A PARKING LOT where the crowd stampedes to cars.

VRMN

Flee, puny worms. I am VRMN,
ruler of the universe.

In the middle of the chaos is--

A TODDLER who sits on the pavement, crying, separated from his parents. Suddenly--

VRMN'S TONGUE shoots out like a lizard's and snatches up the small child, dangling him high above the parking lot. VRMN's other mouth works overtime with--

VRMN
Aw, cute little baby.
(slurp, slurp)
A toothsome tidbit, fresh meat for
my tummy.

IN THE PARKING LOT a distraught MOTHER glances up, fear contorting her face as she recognizes the danger with--

MOTHER
My BABY! My BABY!

ON THE ROOF VRMN dislocates its other mouth like a snake and opens wide, lowering the kid, ready to dine, when--

POV - HEADSUP DISPLAY.- Roaring down on VRMN and the toddler is the view from inside the SAV.

IRONMAN
Targeting hostage. Full power!
Now!

CLOSE ON THE TONGUE as it lets go of the toddler who falls toward the slathering jowls of VRMN when--

WHOOSH! midair, the IronMan sweeps in close, snatching the pink innocent from the jaws of death.

IN THE PARKING LOT the IronMan lands gently on the ground, handing off the toddler to his quaking mother with--

IRONMAN
Next time, madam, find a better
babysitter.

ON THE ROOF VRMN is apoplectic. It scowls as ports open on its chest, revealing the dual speakers. Suddenly--

KERHONKKK!!! The loudest noise ever heard blasts from the VRMN, hitting--

THE PARKING LOT where people fall to their knees, holding their heads, their ears bleeding, as car windows, street lights and factory glass shatters around them.

The IronMan clutches his hands into FISTS and flies like a battering ram straight up and--

KERKLANG! VRMN is hit in the stomach. The creature doubles over, the ear-shattering sound system whimpers to a halt and VRMN tumbles headlong off the rooftop. It lands--

KERKLUNK! on top of an empty car. As it recovers and rises up, a glint of pure hatred comes from its eyes.

POV - HEADSUP DISPLAY - All systems are in operation as the IronMan roars down on--

VRMN whose mouths snap open and--

BRRRUPPP!!! two plumes of fire, roiling balls of flame, hit--

THE IRONMAN who is knocked out of the sky, landing in the middle of the parking lot.

HOVERING IN THE AIR VRMN increases his heat exhalation, the blast becoming a furnace, bearing down on--

THE IRONMAN who labors to stand under the intense heat. The asphalt underneath him gets sticky, melting, becoming a huge spot of tar which the superhero sinks into. Suddenly, the flames stop, revealing the IronMan, trapped in goo.

A CADILLAC seems to rise on its own, but underneath is the VRMN. He tosses the huge car like a toy and it lands--

KEKRASH! on top of the IronMan. KEKRASH! Now a Buick comes tumbling down. KEKRASH! Now a Pontiac is added to the heap.

THE VRMN is having fun, tossing cars, one after another, burying the IronMan. Now he spreads his wings and rises up--

OVER THE FACTORY higher and higher. The VRMN disappears into the clouds with--

VRMN

I will rule the world. Expect no pity. I am your master. And you will adore me.

IN THE PARKING LOT the pile of cars smolder over the spot where the IronMan was last seen. Suddenly--

KERASH!!! the IronMan's fist punches through the hood of the top car. The fist sparks with electricity which shorts out on the twisted of metal.

INT. TELEVISION MONITOR - DAY - THE TWO BUREAU ANCHORS

Christy Nichols and Culver Washington, backed by a press photo BLOWUP of VRMN fighting the IronMan, nod with mock-serious intent as "WHAT WILL THEY THINK OF NEXT?" is supered over.

CHRISTY

Hello, this is Christy Nichols...

CULVER

...and Culver Washington with,
"WHAT WILL THEY THINK OF NEXT?"

CHRISTY

VRMN. Who is he? What is he?
Where does he come from?

CULVER

And at just the right moment this
airborne super-hero shows up to
save the day? Fiction? No!
Fact.

CULVER

Is this some kind of outrageous
publicity stunt dreamed up by the
new management at Stark
International?

CHRISTY

And if it is, then the joke is on
the public. Because the fear and
damage were very real.

CHRISTY

And the real TOPPER is that this
Hero-Villain marketing scheme is
working so well.

CULVER

Retailers can't keep enough VRMN
headsets on the shelves to satisfy
hungry consumers.

CHRISTY

One of our reporters ran into a
group of teens who paid three
hundred dollars a piece on the
black market for their Virtual
Reality headsets...

INT. ROCKAWAY BEACH SUBWAY STATION - DAY - VIDEO POV

TEN TEENAGERS jostle for position in front of the ENG camremote as a REPORTER shoves a microphone at them. Even though their swear words are squelched, from the shape of their mouths it is obvious what they say.

REPORTER O.S.

So, tell us about the hottest summer ticket?

TEENAGER #1

Totally (BEEP) radical!

TEENAGER #2

Awesome! I never seen anything so (BEEP, BEEP) maxed out in my life.

TEENAGER #3

That VRMN sucker is so (BEEP) UGLY, he's BEAUTIFUL.

TEENAGER #4

It's like total (BEEP) brain candy, man.

TEENAGER #5

Yeah, and that Iron Dude was like righteously solid until he got the (BEEP) kicked out of him.

TEENAGER #6

I want to see a rematch!

TEENAGERS

(as one)

YEAH! Rematch! Rematch!
Rematch! Rematch! REMATCH!

INT. SEWER SYSTEM - NIGHT - VRMN

sits on horse-like haunches under a stream of detritus as--

A RADIO ANTENNA rises from the shoulder behind the two-mouthed face, which drools gleefully as the sound of an AUDIO SCAN through radio bands echoes down the dank tunnel, stopping at--

TEENAGERS V.O.

(as one)

Rematch! Rematch! Rematch!

REPORTER O.S.

That's what it's like here in Far
Rockaway. Back to you, Christy,
Culver?

VRMN gives a husky chuckle as LASER EYES snap with brilliance,
X-raying the cables and tubes and pipes which surround him.

INT. TELEVISION STUDIO - DAY - CHRISTY AND CULVER

temper their disgust and shake their heads with--

CHRISTY

If you concerned parents out there
think it's a lost cause, think
again.

CULVER

Not everybody is being duped by
this, the baldest form of event
marketing these reporters have
ever witnessed.

CHRISTY

Many have taken their pleas to
Mid-town....

EXT. STARK INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS - DAY - PROTESTORS

with PLACARDS parade by the hundreds, clogging traffic,
marching in a circle, angry, bumping up against a nervous line
of TWENTY NYPD OFFICERS. Signs read:

PARENTS AGAINST CASHING IN ON CHILDREN

STAMP OUT VRMN

WHAT NEXT? 3-D SNUFF FILMS?

A MICROPHONE is shoved at a gaggle of PROTESTORS who look
directly into the camera.

REPORTER O.S.

Culver, Christy, I'm sharing the
sidewalk in front of Stark
International with some very
unhappy consumers.

PROTESTOR #1

Our children have become nothing
more than a cash register for
corporations to exploit!

PROTESTOR #2

I say, make a buck on someone else!

PROTESTOR #3

This morning my own son slapped me when I asked him to take off that horrible headset!

PROTESTOR #4

I love America, but products like this should be censored.

PROTESTORS

(chant as a group)

Boycott! Boycott! Boycott!

Boycott!

BACK IN THE STUDIO Christy and Culver are pleased by the news scoop, sharing snide smiles with--

CHRISTY

It all leads to the inevitable question...

CULVER

..."WHAT WILL THEY THINK OF NEXT?"

INT. STARK INTERNATIONAL BOARDROOM - DAY - FIFTEEN LAWYERS

split their time between conference calls, computer terminals and hard copies of legal briefs as--

Stubin paces in front of Jeremy Bland who wears DARK SUNGLASSES. Except for a nervous tick in his mouth, he sits very still as--

LAWYER #1

Stark International stock has fallen fifty points in the last hour...

LAWYER #2

We're up to 300 lawsuits totalling 80 billion dollars on the VRMN malfunction alone...

LAWYER #3

The FCC is sending over a team of investigators tomorrow...

LAWYER #4

We're being boycotted in 36 states and the Catholic church has issued an encyclical...

LAWYER #5

It's going to take a miracle to
keep us out of chapter 11...

STUBIN

We should try to settle out of
court on all the lawsuits. I can
stall the FCC for a couple of
days--

BLAND

--Everyone OUT!
(stands abruptly)
Except for Stubin!

The room quiets instantly and the lawyers obediently march out.
Bland turns to Stubin with a pen and a single piece of paper,
which tremble incredibly in hands that look pale and aged.

BLAND

Your work during this crisis has
been exemplary, Bob. And now it
is time to reap the fruits of your
labor. Sign and become the chief
executive officer of Stark
International. Congratulations.

STUBIN

But, Mr. Bland, I don't deserve
such an honor as...

(reading)

...wait a minute. This document
is dated a week ago. That would
put me at risk for all the--

Bland takes off his sunglasses, revealing BLOODSHOT EYES which
are manic and terrifying. His gaze travels over to the lethal,
floor-to-ceiling-windows.

BLAND

--you'll like the VIEW from your
new office! Just sign it...

Stubin follows Bland's gaze to the window and knows what Bland
is thinking. He quickly takes up the pen and obeys.

BLAND

...now, get out.

When he is alone, Bland checks the contents of--

A BRIEFCASE filled with airline tickets, stock options, a
Michellin guide for Switzerland and a VRS headset. The lid
shuts and--

Bland turns to the door with--

BLAND

And now God will ascend to his
heaven in the Swiss alps--

KERASH! Through the floor-to-ceiling windows blasts the IronMan. Encrusted ASPHALT dulls and blackens the red and gold metal. SPARKS shoot from cracks in the body armor. HYDRAULIC FLUIDS leak all over the carpet.

CLOSE ON THE IRONMAN'S EYES which try to blink away the pain and sweat and fatigue.

POV -- HEADSUP DISPLAY -- Warning lights caution of multiple malfunctions and system overloads as Bland circles his adversary with--

BLAND

...well, well, well. The hero of
the day. Just who could it be
under all that technological
gobbledy-gook? Is it the real
Tony Stark?

IRONMAN

I want my company back.

BLAND

Fine. It's all yours!

When the IronMan takes a step forward, more SPARKS and FLUID shoot from the ruptured suit.

POV -- HEADSUP DISPLAY -- Warning lights intensify as Bland's image shimmers like a mirage, leering with--

BLAND

This is great. Does the tin man
have a REAL HEART in there?

(laughter)

Can I tell you a little something
that will make you really mad? I
was just on my way down to your
laboratory to steal all those
computer discs with your
inventions on them!

With Herculean effort, the IronMan lunges and dives at Bland who steps out of the way, revealing--

THE JAGGED HOLE in the window. The IronMan plunges through it.

EXT. STARK INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS - DAY - WINDOWS AND STEEL streak in a blur behind the IronMan as he falls forty stories and--

KERKLANG!!! His body imbeds in the solid, concrete sidewalk. Through the clearing dust approaches--

A MOB OF PROTESTORS who point and gawk and stare with--

PROTESTOR #1
What is it?

PROTESTOR #2
It's one of those toys.

PROTESTOR #3
Is there a man in there?

PROTESTOR #4
No, it's a machine.

PROTESTOR #5
Look out! It's moving.

POV -- HEADSUP DISPLAY -- It blinks on and off. Warning lights, malfunction indicators and the blurring faces of the crowd as it parts, making way for--

THE IRONMAN who stumbles to his feet, the wrist and ankle thrusters sputtering to life, boosting him into the air. He flies forward, out of control, and--

EXT. MACY'S - DAY - KERASH!

The IronMan destroys the display window, plowing through well-dressed mannikins. The mob of angry protestors follows with--

PROTESTORS
(as a group)
IT'S OUT OF CONTROL!

The Protestors stream through the broken window into the store.

INT. MACY'S - DAY - THE ANGRY MOB

runs through the store, knocking over displays and racks of clothes. They fail to notice a row of--

MANNIKINS which display the fall line of floor-length overcoats. One of them is naked.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY - A MAN

shrouded in an overcoat hails a cab. A Taxi stops, and as the man gets in, the tarnished red and gold of the SAV suit is glimpsed briefly.

EXT. PENTHOUSE - DUSK - MARLENE

glances around, quickly crosses the street and approaches the entrance to Stark's abode.

INT. PENTHOUSE ENTRYWAY - DUSK - MARLENE

enters the dark space and pauses, listening.

MARLENE

Tony? Tony?

INT. LIVING ROOM - DUSK - STARK

leans against a window, peering through blinds, his face bruised, his lip cut, his white shirt bloody.

STARK

Were you followed?

MARLENE

I don't know. I went to three different pharmacies. But no one would give me the medication without a prescription.

STARK

Nitro-glycerin. An explosive for my ailing heart. Destruction and salvation seem to have a way of working together in my body...

UNGK!

Stark clutches his chest and looks at Marlene, who rushes across the room to support him. Stark levels an intense gaze at Marlene with--

STARK

I have committed the ultimate crime. The inventor who has lost control of his inventions.

(gathers strength)

I must get to the lab. It's the only place I can fix the SAV.

MARLENE

You're the only one who can stop
that thing, aren't you?

Stark starts to say something, but more chest pains make it hard for him to breath. Marlene steadies Stark as he hoists the Metal Case with effort.

INT. SEWER SYSTEM - NIGHT - A CLAW-LIKE HAND

reaches out and tugs on a huge PIPE, snapping it from its junction. RAW SEWAGE gushes from the broken conduit as--

VRMN raises some of the tar-like goo to his two noses and sniffs. The smell illicit a smile from two mouths. Like Cerberus playing near the shores of the river Styx, VRMN rips--

ANOTHER PIPE open and FRESH WATER flows freely.

CLOSE ON VRMN as it jams the TWO DIFFERENT PIPES together and raw sewage flows where fresh water used to be.

EXT. ROCKEFELLER CENTER - NIGHT - THE OPERA CROWD

takes in a warm summer evening. It's intermission and the FOUNTAINS are radiant with crystal clear water which gushes forth in abstract designs. Suddenly--

THE WATER TURNS DARK as raw sewage sprays from every nozzle, and a stench permeates--

THE ONCE-SERENE CROWD of finely-dressed folks who begin to smell something AWFUL. People gag, raising handkerchiefs to their faces, shouting, screaming, running in all directions for some kind of relief as--

The blocked up sewage fountain spills over onto the sidewalk.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT - STARK

clutches the metal case as Marlene helps him into the passenger seat. Sirens whail in the distance.

STARK

The Warfare Robot has started to
execute its guerilla tactics.

Marlene rushes to the driver's seat when, from behind--

STEROID'S MASSIVE HANDS grab Marlene around the neck and begin to throttle the life out of her.

MARLENE

(choke, choke)
Tony...!

IN THE CAR Stark struggles to stand as chest pains wrack his body.

Steroid grins and draws the dying Marlene close, whispering into her ear--

STEROID
...nice neck, Miss Fortune.

Marlene reaches for hidden strength, lashes out with an elbow, catches Steroid square in the throat.

GRLKKK!!! eyes wide with surprise, Steroid staggers backward, tries to speak, but nothing, not even air can pass in or out. He claws at his windpipe, which is collapsed.

Marlene recovers, gathers herself up into a karate stance and THWOK! FIP! PUK! hits Steroid repeatedly with deadly blows to the groin, the chest and the head. The muscle-bound hitman falls to the ground, his life extinguished.

IN THE CAR Marlene sits next to Stark, who, in spite of his condition, is impressed.

MARLENE
(with a wink)
I tried to tell you I could take
care of myself.

The Sports Car's engine roars to life.

INT. SEWER - NIGHT - VRMN

punches a hole in concrete and comes out with a BUNDLE of wires. He yanks more bundles out from a CONDUIT. Now he jams them together and brilliant SPARKS shower in the dank space.

EXT. HOME ENTERTAINMENT CENTER - NIGHT - AN ANCHORMAN

dressed in a Scotch tweed coat and bow tie, smiles at us with a mock-serious air from a bank of THIRTY TELEVISION SETS, all on sale in a display window.

ANCHORMAN

National Guard and SWAT teams are on the alert tonight after authorities determined that an ill-fated publicity stunt has a new and bizarre twist. A new "toy" from Stark International called VRMN is actually a secret, Pentagon-funded warfare robot designed to wage terrorist tactics behind enemy lines. And it is currently loose in our city--

G-ZZZAPP!!! and the Anchorman is replaced by HUGE BREASTS, heaving on all thirty TVs.

INT. SEWER - NIGHT - VRMN

steps up to a welded strong box. He smashes open the door and his huge claws expertly unbundle several delicate wires. From his stomach he jacks his own connecting wires into the strong box and flips down from his chest--

A BUILT-IN FLAT-SCREEN TV which diagrams circuits and electronic avenues in rapid succession. ONE FREEZES and key points EXPAND several times to reveal a delicate symmetry of access corridors.

VRMN'S CLAW pauses over a keypad EXECUTE BUTTON as a husky chuckle echoes through the space.

EXT. CHASE MANHATTAN BANK - NIGHT - A ROW OF READY TELLERS

stand unoccupied. In concert all the SMOKED GLASS COVERS rise and, as if printing money, TWENTY DOLLAR BILLS rapidly spit from each of them.

EXT. MANHATTAN STREETS - NIGHT - A STRETCH LIMOUSINE

weaves its way through the chaos created by VRMN, swerving into an intersection where--

STREET LIGHTS blink red above a smoldering FIVE CAR PILE UP. Nearby--

A CROWD OF FRENZIED PEOPLE fight in front of a bank as clouds of money swirl over their heads and--

A FIRE HYDRANT sheered off by a capsized BUS spews RAW SEWAGE into the air. In the spray--

NEW YORK FIREMEN dressed in green toxic-spill suits attempt to quell the effluvia.

INT. MOVING LIMOUSINE - NIGHT - JEREMY BLAND

wears the HEATHER Virtual Reality headset as chaos reigns supreme outside the windows. A lecherous giggle comes from deep within the evil man as--

POV - VIRTUAL VISION - Heather's makeup is smeared, her mascara runs, a wind whips through her hair, her red, white and blue teddy is ripped into tatters, and she howls like a banshee as--

KERWHOMP!!! A MUSHROOM CLOUD explodes on the horizon of Jeremy Bland's shattered consciousness.

INT. SUBWAY STATION - NIGHT - SIRENS AND CHAOS AND NOISE

echo through corridors as VRMN strides past LATE-NIGHT COMMUTERS who gawk and scream and run for the relative safety of the streets above.

AN NYPD BEAT COP spies the huge monster and keys a walkie-talkie with--

COP

This is Mulroney at the Columbus Circle subway station. That VRMN thing... It's goin' into tunnel number four headed downtown.

INT. SUBWAY TRACKS - NIGHT - VRMN

glances over its shoulder, growls and walks toward the tunnel. Its tail strikes the THIRD RAIL, showering sparks. As it is swallowed by blackness, more violent sparks illuminate a dark silhouette. Silence. Then the sound of radio chatter--

RADIO #1 O.S.

Blue team is deployed. Over

RADIO #2 O.S.

Red team is waiting your orders.
Over.

Slowly, cautiously, a SWAT TEAM OF TWENTY MEN, heavily armed, in battle-ready fatigues and helmets, creeps along the rails. One by one the men slip into the darkness. Silence. Suddenly--

ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE as, in the shower of sparks and gunfire, the black outline of VRMN picks up a SWAT Cop, tossing him into a wall. Darkness.

BURSTS of gunfire and ricochets and the screams of men punctuate the silence.

MORE SPARKS, sustained, like a lightening storm, reveal the VRMN monster as it grabs another SWAT Cop, snapping his neck. Darkness and silence.

A BURST of gunfire. Silence. A scream of agony. Out of the dark tunnel--

A SWAT COP flies into the light, landing on the third rail, jerking as millions of volts pass through his body.

The moans of agony, the gunfire, the growl of VRMN, all mix in a nightmare-like symphony.

INT. "SKUNKWORKS" - NIGHT - STARK AND MARLENE

run through the massive interior. A horrible KERASH! makes them freeze in their tracks. They peer into the dark cavern. What they see--

Backing out of the vaulted door, COMPUTER DISCS and BLUEPRINTS in his arms, Jeremy Bland turns and reveals--

A HIDEOUS VISAGE. As if melting, Jeremy Bland's face sags horribly on one side, an afflicted eye twitching, the muscles slack and wrinkled. It all ends in a pathetic, little twisted mouth that barely moves as Bland struggles to talk.

BLAND

Hauw touchink. The wuvers on the heath...

Bland drops what he is carrying and hoists up a .38 REVOLVER.

BLAND

...any wast wequests? Befaw I kiwl bof uv yew and escape wif yer mind on a hawd disc?

STARK

Radical Empowerment Syndrome. The worst case I've ever seen. This is what you're giving away to the kids of America?

BLAND

I don' GIF' anyfing away, Stawk!

STARK

I can help you out of this--

BLAND

--hewp me! Wha' a joke. I don' need yer hewp. Nobawdy fuks wif Jewemy Bwand an' gits away wif it!

Trembling, Bland aims the .38 at Stark. Suddenly Marlene leaps in front of him and--

BANG! BANG! BANG! bullets explode all around Marlene and Stark. One finds its mark, catching Marlene point-blank in the stomach.

Stark leaps at Bland, grabbing for the gun, pushing him off his feet, and the next shots BANG! BANG! BANG! tear into the ground. Bland's head snaps back on the floor, knocking him unconscious. Stark rushes to--

Marlene's crumpled form, lifting her head in his hands. Her eyes blink, blue and green.

MARLENE

I guess I couldn't take care of myself...

And she slips into a deadly coma.

INT. CRYO-ROOM - NIGHT - A CHAMBER

sits in the middle of the cement bunker. Carrying Marlene, Stark manipulates a keypad with his free hand and the hatch whines open, revealing--

A STAINLESS STEEL INTERIOR where nozzles and ports glisten. Urgent but gentle, Stark lays Marlene inside and punches commands on the keypad, his stern gaze silently saying goodbye.

LIQUID NITROGEN CLOUDS swirl, enveloping Marlene's peaceful face. The lid whines shut on the silent coffin as--

A CORE-BODY TEMPERATURE GAUGE tracks Marlene's journey to absolute zero.

INT. "SKUNKWORKS" - MOMENTS LATER - AT A KEYBOARD

Stark rubs his chest as he hovers over video monitors and printouts, a man obsessed.

STARK

No, dammit! Try the anaglyph!

ON A MONITOR hi-tech 3D imaging distorts and maps various configurations of the SAV.

STARK

Much better! More parallax. Now invert the image.

A solarized image of the SAV appears, quivering and shifting between positive and negative.

IN THE BULLSEYE CIRCLE a whirl of metal un-telescopes as the lower portion of the SAV springs from a black disc, hovering, as if worn by someone invisible. Stark steps close with--

STARK

Run systems check.

COMPUTER VOICE

A-I systems, check. Inference engines systems, check. Bio-chip cortex and mapping systems one through 99, check.

STARK

Good. Sector check and connect the suit.

FROM THE REMAINING DISC a whirl of metal un-telescopes as the upper torso of the SAV springs out KA-CHINK! linking with the lower, becoming a full body, floating in the middle of the bullseye.

STARK

Switch to macro 10.

Stark leans in close to the TRIANGULAR RECESS in the chest of the SAV, examining the edges with a MICRO-SURGERY ANALYZER. What he sees--

A CIRCUITRY FIELD with interfacing ports which are singed black and badly damaged.

A TINY FILAMENT extends from the analyzer, cleaning everything it touches.

INT. ARGON CHAMBER - MOMENTS LATER - THROUGH A VIEWING PORT

ROBOT ARMS and GALVANIC INDUCTOR LAMPS fill the small room. Thick doors whine shut as Stark leans close to a microphone with--

STARK

Inject argon bubble foam from the resonantly tuned microwave mold system.

COMPUTER VOICE

Doping with nickel-iron mylar super-strata.

The robot arms lower, plugging into nodes at the waist and shoulders of the SAV. The bright, galvanic inductor lamps click on and off, baking a new surface which glows iridescent.

STARK
Good. Now check elasticity.

COMPUTER VOICE
Internal inductor structural
integrity auto-reformation trigger
subsystem, check.

IN THE ARGON CHAMBER sonic booms shudder and shake the SAV in a show of techno-force.

STARK
Check structural memory and
reflectivity.

COMPUTER
Interlaced smart servo muscle
network with guidance point
subsystems, check. Cloaking mylar
epidermis, check. Test complete.

A WHIRL of telescoping metal and the SAV collapses in an instant. All that remains is the TWO BLACK DISCS, sitting in the Metal Case on the floor inside.

STARK
The only question is... will it be
enough?

Stark punches codes into a keypad and--

CLOSE ON A STEEL HATCH which whines open. Sitting inside a metal drawer is a stubby, mean-looking projectile launcher, the RAILGUN.

COMPUTER VOICE
Kinetic energy rail gun coupled
with rapid auto-feed, multi-
firing, rotary breach, ballistic
cannon on articulated, Howard
steady mount with intelligent
firing control support system,
check.

The SI logo glistens from the polished surface as Stark hefts the weapon in both hands. Suddenly--

A SHADOW spreads over Stark from above. He looks up to see--
THROUGH THE SKYLIGHT the winged silhouette of VRMN.

INT. "SKUNKWORKS" - NIGHT - VRMN'S CLAW

punches start-up buttons and--

BANKS OF 1 INCH TAPE MACHINES chug forward in unison.

EXT. POSH SUBURB - NIGHT - TV ANTENNAS AND SATELLITE DISHES
ring the affluent community.

INT. NEW BEDROOM - NIGHT - JIMMY LYNCH

and his THREE BUDDIES lounge around the huge room, flipping
through comic books, throwing darts, playing Nintendo when--

CLOSE ON A BROADCAST INDICATOR on a VRS headset near Jimmy
which chimes and blinks. Jimmy sits up, excited, with--

JIMMY

Hey, guys, check it out.

BUDDY #1

It must be a new show.

Jimmy and his buddies strap on their headsets and flip down the
eyecaps.

INT. NEW HOUSE - NIGHT - A TEN THOUSAND PIECE JIGSAW PUZZLE

is spread out on the floor in front of Sarah Lynch, who
struggles to put the pieces together.

IN A MASSIVE CHAIR Bill holds a newspaper too close, hiding a
sappy smile and a Virtual Reality headset, eyecaps flipped
down. The sound bleeds with--

HEATHER III O.S.

Do you want to go around the world
this time, Bill?

INT. "SKUNKWORKS" - NIGHT - IN THE VRS CHAMBER

VRMN, like the king of some rock and roll nightmare, thrusts a
hip, swaggers a few steps and raises a microphone with--

VRMN

This is a message to all my loyal
warriors out there in Virtual
Reality land. The time has come
to change the world as we know it.
The time has come for... CHAOS.

INT. POOL ROOM - NIGHT - THE TEN TEENAGERS

who were interviewed on *WHAT WILL THEY THINK OF NEXT?* sprawl on pool tables, headsets on, listening to a transmission. The sound of VRMN's voice bleeds with--

VRMN

I want you all to go to where the sharp things are hidden. All the knives and stakes and skewers and scissors...

INT. "SKUNKWORKS" - NIGHT - STARK

sneaks along the edge of the large room and peers around a storage cabinet. What he sees--

IN THE VRS CHAMBER VRMN plays to his audience with--

VRMN

...and I want you to take all those sharp things! And go on a RAMPAGE!

INT. LYNCH KITCHEN - NIGHT - JIMMY AND HIS THREE BUDDIES

wearing Virtual Reality headsets, lift HUGE KNIVES out of a kitchen drawer. The glint of metal shines on the slack jaws of kids in a power grip beyond their control.

INT. POOL ROOM - NIGHT - THE TEENAGERS

snap pool cues in half, flip out switch blades, break bottles apart, finding their own sharp things.

INT. "SKUNKWORKS" - NIGHT - STARK

breathlessly leans against the Argon Chamber and peers through the viewport at--

THE BLACK DISCS which sit inside the Metal Case.

IN THE VRS CHAMBER VRMN rises to his full height like a televangelist from the dark side of eternity.

VRMN

GO ON A RAMPAGE! GO ON A RAMPAGE!
GO ON A RAMPAGE! GO ON A RAMPAGE!

EXT. BROOKLYN STREET - NIGHT - THE TEENAGERS

fully under the spell, run like crazed hyenas towards--

A HIGH SCHOOL where the Marquee reads: *WELCOME ALL PARENTS, OPEN HOUSE*. Through windows, PARENTS can be seen socializing. The night is warm and the sound of their conversations reaches--

THE PACK OF WILD BOYS as VRMN's voice bleeds with--

VRMN

We will rule the world tonight...

INT. NEW HOUSE - NIGHT - JIMMY AND HIS BUDDIES

knives raised, walk like zombies down the hall toward the living room where their unsuspecting elders while away the evening.

INT. "SKUNKWORKS" - NIGHT - STARK

sees his opening and throws aside the Argon Chamber hatch, dashing for the SAV components. The CLUNK! sound of the door reaches--

THE VRS CHAMBER and VRMN snaps out of his demented rapture, lowers the microphone and sees something which makes him--

VRMN

GRRAAAAAAGGGHH!!!

IN THE ARGON CHAMBER bare feet step onto a black disc and--

A WHIRL of metal un-telescopes up Stark's legs and torso, locking around his shoulders as--

HANDS press into the other disk and--

A WHIRL of metal un-telescopes, crawling up arms and down the body's trunk.

CLOSE ON THE METAL CASE which collapses, folds in on itself, clicking, snapping and becoming the triangle of platinum.

THE IRONMAN snaps it into place on the chest of the SAV. He flexes majestically as the suit fills with power and exudes strength.

Power thrusters cough flames and the IronMan lunges forward, fists extended, hurtling through space.

POV - HEADSUP DISPLAY - VRMN is directly in his path.

EXT. BROOKLYN STREET - NIGHT - THE TEENAGERS

are like statues, frozen in an urban garden, their weapons at their sides as--

INT. NEW LYNCH HOUSE - NIGHT - THE SHADOWS OF KNIVES

hover on the wall above Sarah, who can't decide which piece of the jigsaw puzzle to put in next.

ACROSS THE ROOM Bill remains oblivious and blissed out on *HEATHER III*.

INT. "SKUNKWORKS" - NIGHT - IN THE VRS CHAMBER

VRMN braces for the hit as--

The IronMan comes on like a freight train, straight at the VRMN. In the middle of the chamber they meet--

KERASH!!! and bounce off one another, flying in opposite directions.

The IronMan leaps to his feet and faces--

VRMN who roars forward, spitting a challenge with--

VRMN

Tony Stark! You spineless cur! I
will kill you and eat your heart.

VRMN rages across the room. At the last possible moment--

The IronMan deftly propels himself out of the way and--

KERKRASH! VRMN plows into the Argon Chamber, destroying it like a house made of dust.

FROM ABOVE the IronMan leaps, feet first, down on VRMN and K-BONG! knocks him off-balance. But instantly--

VRMN'S MUSCULAR TAIL lashes out, grabbing the IronMan's ankle.

VRMN

You'll never turn me off again.
Insect. You will die tonight.

VRMN spins the IronMan, round and round, slamming him--

KERASH! into a concrete wall which turns to powder. Out of the debris leaps--

The IronMan, fists cupped together, aiming at--

VRMN who dodges the flying punch and--

KERBANG! The IronMan's fists hit a pipe system which splits open and spews raw sewage into the room. From behind--

VRMN lunges and grabs the IronMan by the throat with STEEL TALONS, squeezing a chokehold tighter and tighter with--

VRMN

Now I'm going to make you eat some
garbage, Tony Stark. And then
I'll help you swallow it.

TWO MUSCULAR ELBOWS power into the rutted gut of VRMN. He belches smoke as he flies backwards, landing in a heap.

IRONMAN

Thanks, but my doctor has ordered
me to cut down on the junk food.

INT. NEW HOUSE - NIGHT - SARAH

looks up from her jigsaw puzzle with--

SARAH

Did you hear something, darling?

Bill whips off his VRS headset and hides it under the lowered paper, his face twitching with--

BILL

(guilty)

I didn't hear anything. It's
probably just Jimmy playing with
himself... uhn, I mean with his
friends.

Sarah gives Bill an odd look and then finds the hole for her next puzzle piece, pleased with her progress.

INT. DEN - NIGHT - JIMMY AND HIS BUDDIES

roll on the ground, in the grips of a Virtual FistFight, hands grappling with headsets which are latched down tight.

EXT. BROOKLYN STREET - NIGHT - THE TEENAGERS

like bowling pins at a championship tournament, tumble in the street, in the throes of a Virtual Battle.

INT. "SKUNKWORKS" - NIGHT - THE IRONMAN

raises both hands, palms forward, as VRMN charges. But the IronMan just stands there, the perfect target, when--

FOOSH! from the IronMan's extended palms REPULSOR BEAMS like tubes of light, strike--

VRMN and the beams pin him against a wall, his wings SNAPPING OFF at the shoulders as--

ON THE FLOOR Bland comes to consciousness and glances around at what is happening with--

BLAND

Nobody fuks wif Jewemy Bwand...

But Bland is too groggy to notice the river of sewage that licks at his feet.

VRMN struggles against the Repulsor Beams, his mighty arms rising up and grabbing DOUBLE SPEARS which--

VORP! VORP! fly from scabbards on the VRMN's back and--

ZZZ-ING! through the air.

K-TANG! K-TANG! hitting the IronMan square in the chest, knocking him backwards.

Free of the Repulsor Beams, VRMN leaps from a crouch, grabbing the IronMan around the chest in a vice-grip. The IronMan pounds--

KLUDD! KLUDD! KLUDD! and the two warriors struggle in the middle of the room.

VRMN

HAHAHAHA! There's nothing virtual about this reality, Stark!

KLUDD! KLUDD! KLUDD! and more hits from the IronMan distort the double mouth of VRMN into a mass of twisted metal. But the jaws continue to move, VRMN's voice distorted, like a rap remix sampler out of control.

VRMN

Foo-oo-ool. You de-de-designed me to take-take-take all the pu-pu-pu-punishment you-you-you can dish out-out.

VRMN squeezes tighter and--

POV - HEADSUP DISPLAY - Alert sirens sound and readouts constantly pulse with updates.

INSIDE THE SAV Stark winces and bares his teeth. Blood trickles into his eyes. He has never felt such brand new kinds of pain.

INT. "SKUNKWORKS" - NIGHT - KLUDD! KLUDD! KLUDD!

The IronMan pounds again and again, leveling blow after blow after blow. But VRMN only giggles with--

VRMN
Quit-quit-quit tick-tick-tickling
me.

VRMN tightens its hammerlock death grip. The IronMan cannot escape.

POV - HEADSUP DISPLAY - The image blinks and rolls, distorted by the amazing pressure. It's getting hard to see as--

INSIDE THE SAV Stark gropes for consciousness with--

STARK
Electro-pulse shield. NOW!

INT. "SKUNKWORKS" - NIGHT - A SWIRLING SPIRAL OF ENERGY

like a heat wave, pushes out from the IronMan's chest, force against force, pushing VRMN's powerful arms up and away.

The IronMan collapses to the ground and--

CLINK! CLINK! the Triangle of platinum, dislodged from its recess, skitters across the floor. The turbines whine down and systems shut off as the IronMan feebly tries to crawl away.

VRMN, stripped clean of its villainous markings, towers above. The wings, the double-mouth, the hideous face, all have given way to the familiar, streamlined, grey exterior of the Warfare Robot Project.

WRP/VRMN
Mo-mo-moron! I am invinc-vinc-
vinc-vincible! HA-HA HA-HA. An
ad-ad-ad-admirable effort, Iron-
Iron-IronMan. A pity it-it-it
only pro-pro-pro-prolongs the in-
in-inevitable. HA-HA HA-HA. And
now-now-now it is time-time-time
to end-end-end your ex-ex-ex-
existence.

WRP/VRMN raises a blunt fist over his head with--

WRP/VRMN
Read-read-ready for a little bra-
bra-bra-brain surgery?

KLANG! KLANG! KLANG! KLANG! KLANG! WRP/VRMN pummels the helpless IronMan. Dents and gashes form on the outer skin of--

The IronMan as KLANG! KLANG! KLANG! KLANG! KLANG! Silence. The super-hero lies in a crumpled heap.

WRP/VRMN grabs the unconscious IronMan by the neck, dragging him across the floor toward the VRS chamber.

CLOSE ON THE IRONMAN as his limp hand, raking across the floor, comes to life momentarily and latches onto--

THE RAILGUN which lies in the path to the VRS chamber.

WRP/VRMN drops the IronMan in a heap, steps into--

THE VRS CHAMBER and with a triumphant leer WRP/VRMN raises the microphone to its battered, out-of-sync speakers.

WRP/VRMN

All right-right-right. You just
wit-wit-wit-witnessed the vic-vic-
victory of EV-EV-EVIL over GOOD.
Hunh?

WRP/VRMN hears something. It's a low decibel whine. Wheeling around, it faces--

THE IRONMAN who levels the stubby muzzle and guiding shaft of the RailGun with--

IRONMAN

Time to eat crow, metal head.

THE LED on the RailGun flashes, *ARMED AND ENGAGED*.

From the WRP/VRMN'S SPEAKER PORT emits a howl.

WRP

Oh-Oh-Oh shi-shi-SHIT!!!

CLOSE ON THE IRONMAN'S HAND as it comes down on the POWERGRIP PLUNGER of the RailGun and--

WHITE LIGHT is followed by VICIOUS THUNDER as--

A PROTON PROJECTILE leaps from the RailGun's muzzle. Guided by the shaft, it hurtles into--

WRP/VRMN and KA-KA-KA-BOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!! an enormous explosion roils out of the VRS chamber, enveloping the IronMan where he stands, travelling outward, searing everything in its path.

THE WALLS OF THE "SKUNKWORKS" fall over with a reverberating shockwave, bringing down--

THE VAULTED CEILING like an earthquake off the scale. The tumultuous chaos continues until nothing is left standing. Everything is in ruins.

In the hazy dust of destruction there is only silence. Then--

A HAND, red and gold, attached to an arm and a shoulder, pushes out from under the rubble. But somewhere there is the sound of a distress signal.

INT. NEW HOUSE - NIGHT - JIMMY AND HIS BUDDIES

rip off their VRS headsets, eyes glazed, synapses blown. Jimmy runs to a window and opens it with--

JIMMY

Hey, Joey!

EXT. NEIGHBOR HOUSE - NIGHT - A WINDOW

slides open and neighbor JOEY, backed by several FRIENDS, sticks his head out with--

JOEY

Have you ever seen anything so...
radical?

JIMMY

Right on, IronMan!

EXT. BROOKLYN STREET - NIGHT - THE TEENAGERS

stumble to their feet, the VRS headsets in their hands.

TEENAGER #1

Wow! That was wiggly!

TEENAGER #4

What happened, man?

TEENAGER #5

You saw it! That Iron dude kicked
VRMN's ass! It was awesome.

INT. REMAINS OF CRYO-ROOM - NIGHT - A LIGHT

flashes red and buzzes as a read-out warns--

NITROGEN LEAK: BIO-SYSTEM THREATENED

The IronMan plows through rubble and pushes away debris, revealing--

THE CHAMBER as red and gold fingers dig into the metal cover, prying at the sealed compartment. Stress and distortion and finally the lid of the Cryo-Chamber creaks open, revealing--

MARLENE'S PEACEFUL FORM which the IronMan lifts out of the chamber, becoming--

INT. STARK'S MASSIVE FACTORY - DAWN - AIRBORNE

The IronMan, carrying Marlene, flies through the craggy remains of the "Skunkworks", into the disc of the dawning sun.

INT. REMAINS OF "SKUNKWORKS" - DAWN - JEREMY BLAND

huffs and puffs and digs his way out from under smoking, charred wreckage. Then he hears something, KA-CHINK! KA-CHINK! KA-CHINK! and looks around to see--

VRMN'S SEVERED HAND, like a five-armed insect, crawling through the wreckage toward him.

BLAND

Hey! Wai' a minute! Stay away
fwom me!

Bland is pinned under a beam and watches with growing horror as the crab-like appendage jumps up on his chest. It grabs his face in a vice grip and, with a flick, forces Bland's head into a puddle of raw sewage, drowning him.

BLAND

Gwub. Gwub. Gwub.

EXT. HOSPITAL ROOF - MORNING - THE MAINTENANCE WORKER

wearing a mask and welding as usual, hears a HISSING sound, raises his mask and turns to see--

The IronMan land on the roof, Marlene's body in his arms.

INT. VISITOR'S GALLERY - DAY - THROUGH A WINDOW

above an operating room, a SURGICAL TEAM can be seen laboring over a patient.

A DOCTOR in surgical green tries not to stare at the superhero who stands next to him, gazing down on the operation.

DR.

The bullet didn't hit any vital
organs. She's going to be all
right...

(chooses his words)

...your name again?

IRONMAN

IronMan.

A MAGAZINE SPINS TO FOREGROUND, the cover of *TIME*, and the charismatic Tony Stark stands in front of the *SI* logo with the caption, *21ST CENTURY RENAISSANCE MAN*.

INT. TELEVISION STUDIO - DAY OR NIGHT - CHRISTY AND CULVER smile brightly as the cue cards are flipped. Between them sits--

TONY STARK, comfortable, in a leather chair on the dais.

CHRISTY

First you were kidnapped.

CULVER

Then you were dead.

CHRISTY

Then you were alive.

CULVER

Tony Stark? What will YOU think of next?

STARK

A good question. I think the FUTURE holds the answer.

CHRISTY

Very cryptic, Tony.

CULVER

Do you think we'll be seeing more of this IronMan?

STARK

We've been in serious negotiations to put him under contract with my re-organized company. He's very concerned about the environment, and wants his technology to be used properly. I've got a good feeling he'll take the job.

CHRISTY

I hope he does. Our world could use a few more heroes. Thank you, Mr. Stark.

(turns to camera)

This is Christy Nichols...

CULVER

...and Culver Washington, asking,
"WHAT WILL THEY THINK OF NEXT?"

INT. STAGE WINGS - DAY OR NIGHT - TONY STARK

steps out of the lights, past STAGE HANDS, to the poised and smiling Marlene Fortune. She applauds with--

MARLENE

If your friend decides to take the
job? I hope you let me review the
contract.

Tony Stark and Marlene Fortune kiss, oblivious to the chaos which surrounds them.